Film QUARTERLY

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Film Quarterly

COLOSSAL ANNUAL BOOK ROUNDUP

DESERT FURY, MON AMOUR

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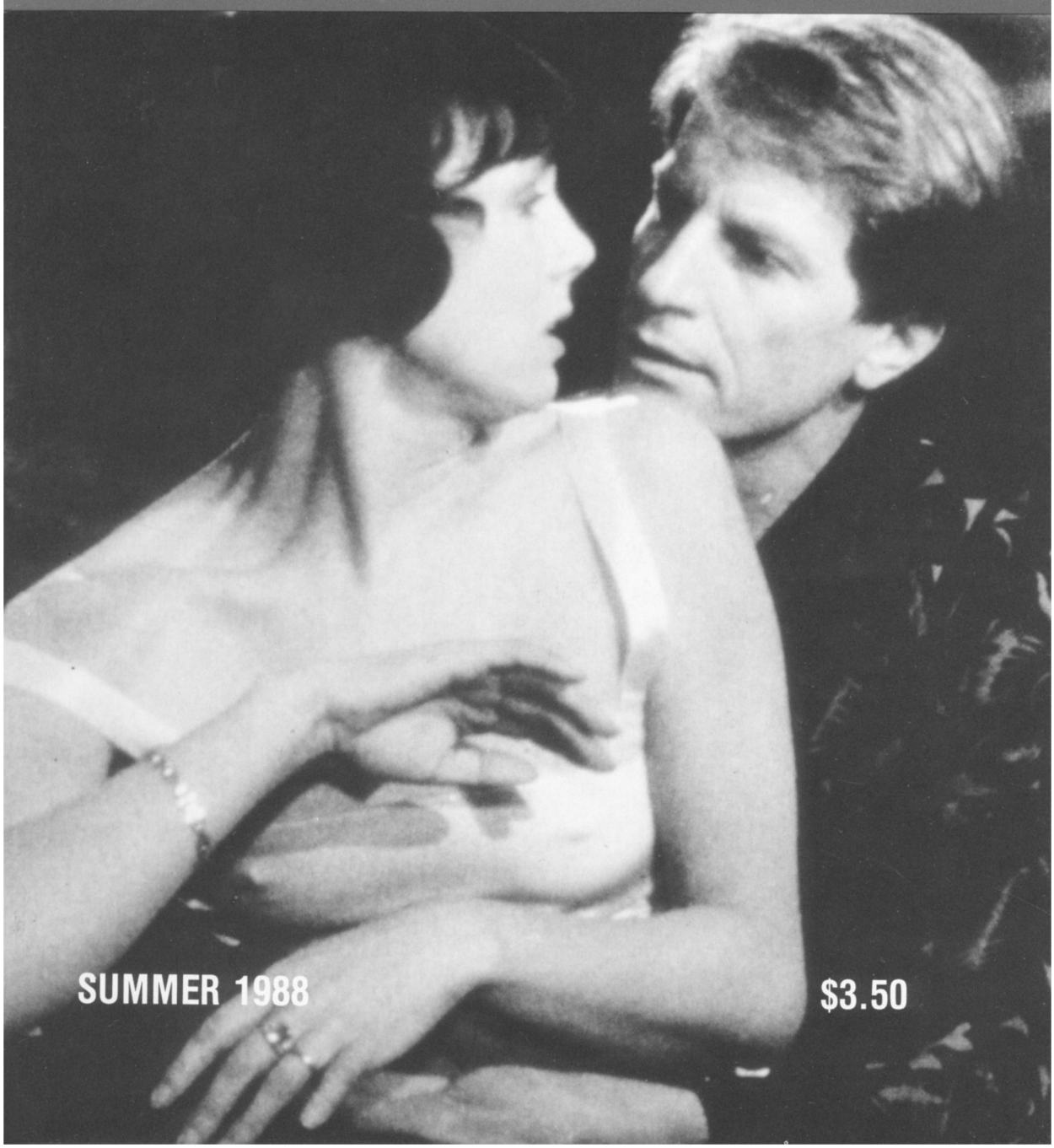

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FILM QUARTERLY (ISSN 0015–1386) is published quarterly at the subscription prices given below by the University of California Press, Berkeley, California 94720. Second-class postage paid at Berkeley, California, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to **Film Quarterly**, University of California Press, Berkeley CA 94720. $3.50 per copy, $14.00 per year for individuals; $28.00 per year for institutions. Subscribers outside USA add $3.00 for postage. Domestic claims for nonreceipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Thereafter, the regular back issue rate will be charged for replacement. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed. Back issues available at $5.00. Editor: Ernest Callenbach. Assistant to the Editor: Bonnie Dehler. New York Editor: William Johnson. Los Angeles Editor: Michael Dempsey. Boston Editor: Randall Conrad. London Editor: Colin Young. Rome Editor: Gideon Bachmann. Advisory Editorial Board: Leo Braudy, Andries Deinum, John Fell, Brian Henderson, Albert Johnson, Marsha Kinder, Neal Oxenhandler. Views expressed in signed articles are those of the authors. Indexed in **Art Index, Book Review Index, Film Literature Index, Humanities Index, International Index to Film Periodicals, Monthly Cumulating Periodical Index,** and **Popular Periodical Index.** Printed in U.S.A. Type: Freedmen's Organization, Los Angeles. Printing: Malloy Lithographing. © 1988 by the Regents of the University of California. Back issues subsequent to Volume 18 (1965–1966) can be obtained from the University of California Press.

DAVID EHRENSTEIN

Desert Fury, Mon Amour

For Vito Russo and Richard Dyer

Pre-Credit Sequence

It would seem that we *know something* about the cinema. The past decade has witnessed no end of theoretical incursions—linguistic, psychoanalytic, technohistorical, feminist—into an audiovisual technique heretofore seen solely as the province of wild-eyed devotees less concerned with whys and wherefores than sensations and sensibilities. Reams of copy have shot from an ever-growing academic superstructure armed to the teeth with methodological weaponry designed to blast apart not merely the nature of the cinematic beast but human consciousness itself. Yet for all of the work that's been done, critical theory has failed to evolve into critical *practice*. The cinema today remains as essentially unexamined as it was at the inception of this analytical jamboree—a quandary, a mystery, a mess.

"Like critics, like historians, but in slightly different ways, theoreticians often help to maintain the cinema in the imaginary enclosure of a pure love," claims Christian Metz.[1] But in truth the ways of critics, historians, and theoreticians aren't different. Theory has consistently claimed for itself a place apart—a cultural higher ground above the fray of common strife that Metz has so justly identified as the "institution" of cinema. "To be a theoretician of the cinema," Metz writes, "one should ideally no longer love the cinema and yet still love it: loved it a lot and only have detached oneself from it by taking it up again from the other end, taking it as the target for the very same scopic drive which had made one love it. Have broken with it, as certain relationships are broken, not in order to move onto something else, but in order to return to it at the next bend in the spiral. Carry the institution inside one still so that it is in a place accessible to self-analysis, but carry it there as a distinct instance which does not overinfiltrate the rest of the ego with the thousand paralyzing bonds of a tender unconditionality. Not have forgotten what the cinephile one used to be was like, in all the details of his affective inflections, in the three dimensions of his living being, and yet no longer be invaded by him: not have lost sight of him, but be keeping an eye on him. Finally, be him and not be him, since all in these are the two conditions on which one can speak of him."[2]

The language suggests a lover attempting to renegotiate a relationship with a mistress "needed" yet not quite "desired" as before. Metz—elegant, passionate, decorous, precise—can't help but give the impression of a writer caught up in a vast preamble to a subject whose discussion he fears elucidating fully. To speak more frankly would risk engagement with that "tender unconditionality" of the cinema's affectivity. And to do so would burst the bubble of quasi-scientific objectivity theorists hold so dear. Metz's Hamlet-like "Be and not be" is a frank admission of his awareness of this epistemological cul-de-sac—an awareness not at all apparent among others theoretically disposed. They're too busy whipping up methodological smokescreens to disguise or deny the critical proscriptiveness inherent in their projects. Yet like some low-grade cultural infection, clear critical biases continue to inhabit these discourses, wending their way through the most blandly bloodless prose—dust-dry treatises invariably opening with that most dreaded of academic invocations: "This paper . . ."

What is to be done, after all, with articles claiming to address notions of cinematic Space, Time and History, that insist on promulgating the works of Oshima and Straub-Huillet as untouchable ideals?[3] What gain is to be made with theories trafficking amidst the deified likes of Ford, Sternberg or Cukor—ostensibly examining "form" yet keeping the content of *auteur*-based idealism intact?[4] How is the study of narrative served by taking the terminology of the Russian formalists then skewering it on some three decades of traditionally received wisdom regarding the evolution of Hollywood, the "New Wave," Soviet cinema in the twenties, etc.?[5] How can feminist battles with the "male

gaze''[6] be waged by exposing Michael Snow's enthrallment to it on the one hand, then falling back to embrace the likes of Nicholas Roeg on the other?[7] In short the Question Cinema: Is theory at base nothing more than a somewhat ostentatiously rarefied exercise in nostalgia?

No need to ask about the *actual* progress of the cinema amidst this academic wool-gathering round retro Hollywood ''classicism.'' It's gone its own way, serenely indifferent, instinctively decadent. Expanding itself on the one end—thanks to increasingly expensive production procedures—it's contracted on the other, the better to squeeze itself into its new home-video format. As this grotesque cyborg bellows and wheezes its way across the culture its means and ends become increasingly difficult to gauge. It's not merely the bipartite beast of FilmVideo that must be addressed, but the hydra-headed monster of ''Media'' as well: network television, newspapers, magazines, tabloids, opinion polls, and computerized informational data banks. All these areas, intimately interconnected, subdivide as well into such multicellular organisms as fashion layouts, rock videos, talk shows, pop recordings, live televised news reports, and made-for-TV ''Movies of the Week.''

The hesitancy and doubt swirling about Metz's ''attempt'' at bringing together ''Freudian psychoanalysis'' and the ''cinematic signifier'' to produce what he, with touchingly tremulous modesty, refers to as a mere ''contribution'' to film theory speaks volumes. *Everything* remains to be said about the cinema. The problem, never really faced, is that there is no simple way to say it.

A Film of No Importance

In the end it all comes down to *Desert Fury*. *Desert Fury*? You haven't heard of it? Of course you haven't. Why should you? A 1947 Paramount release starring Lizabeth Scott and Burt Lancaster, this turgid melodrama about a gambling casino owner's daughter infatuated with an underworld gambler suspected of murder figures in no known pantheon or cult. Its director, Lewis Allen, is devoid of *auteur* status. Its performances are, by and large, not

of award-winning stature. Its composer, Miklos Rozsa, has surely written more interesting musical scores.

Shot in color largely on studio sets representing outdoor locales (there was some actual location shooting as well), *Desert Fury*'s not-quite-*noir* plot makes it the odd-film-out among the equally florid programmers produced during the same period (*I Walk Alone, The Strange Love of Martha Ivers, The File on Thelma Jordan*). You aren't likely to find *Desert Fury* listed on a revival or repertory house schedule. It isn't available on home video. At best you might be able to catch it in some 3 a.m. slot on local television, or unspooled some afternoon when rain cancels a baseball game. And why not? It's "just a movie"—produced, consumed, forgotten. Not good. Not bad. Mediocre. In fact, one might even go so far as to call it *quintessentially* mediocre.

Of course to invoke notions of mediocrity is to evoke the specter of critical qualitativeness so dreaded by theoretical cadres, committed as they are to the promulgation of the notion of "value-free" analyses. Still, it wouldn't be going out on much of a limb to state that the diegesis of *Desert Fury* lacks the textual complexity found in such pantheon favorites as *Young Mr. Lincoln, The Pirate, Touch of Evil, North by Northwest,* or that most persistently picked of theoretical plums *Letter From an Unknown Woman.*

The production of *Desert Fury* plainly involved choices of camera placement, focal length, lighting, sound mixing, musical scoring and the like, perfectly commensurate with studio practices of the late forties at their most routine. The script by Robert Rossen, adapted from a *Saturday Evening Post* serial by Ramona Stewart, is workmanlike but formally quite undistinguished, holding as it does to a simple linear dramatic progression, unities of Time, Place, and Action, and such time-honored melodramatic conventions as "Fate" and "Ironic Coincidence" in the pulling together of otherwise unlinked aspects of plot and characterization. You've seen its like before, and all things being equal you'll doubtless see it again.

And yet something lingers over *Desert Fury*—hangs on, suspended in the studio indoor/outdoor air. For this writer (critic? journalist? theorist? historian? film buff?—the terms begin to slip, as well they might as the text begins to pull astride specified object of desire) cannot quite be *done* with *Desert Fury.* The heavy-lidded, smokey-voiced ambiance of Lizabeth Scott certainly plays a part in this—particularly in those scenes where she's set against the gleamingly dentalized muscularity of the young Burt Lancaster.[8] A certain Pop Art palimpsest common to late forties product observed in retrospect is part of this picture as well—especially as *Desert Fury*'s color gives actors, backgrounds, and objects the polished sheen so prized by Richard Hamilton.[9] Mary Astor's performance as Scott's mother is also there to be enjoyed, albeit in a much more straightforward way—the one element of *Desert Fury* whose quality is not in question. And last but not least there's the novelty of the character played by Wendell Corey—a homosexual psychopath given to dryly cynical asides and sudden violent rages. But then, we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Make no mistake, there's no avoiding the fact that critical congress with *Desert Fury* risks trafficking with nostalgic indulgence at its most absolute. Yet this is *precisely* why a *Desert Fury* is of such intense interest. Standing clear of the swamp of mass-media affection that forever grounds the likes of *Casablanca, Gone with the Wind,* and *Citizen Kane, Desert Fury* can be dissected with cool remove. It speaks to cinematic desires barely formed and only half-uttered—that vague itch for "a movie" answered by a compendium of images and sounds that never reach a level that could be called "memorable" yet somehow manage to "divert."

For any theorist worth his or her salt, the next step would be, of course, to scramble for a proper analytical position. All you have to do is scout a specified ground for study, then nail *Desert Fury* down with an appropriate abstract. Surely there's a *grande syntagmatique* to scrutinize here. Or perhaps a simple two-shot or two containing some quirk of psychoanalytic import. Feminist interest goes without saying. How does the figure of Lizabeth Scott "speak castration"? Let me count the ways . . .

But the simple, brutal fact of the matter is that all these techniques are very much beside the point.

Trouble in Chuckawalla

It's 1947. Let's go to the movies. What's playing? It's *Desert Fury.* Who's in it? Burt

Lancaster and Lizabeth Scott. What's it about? Well . . .

After having been thrown out of her fifth finishing school, Paula Haller (Lizabeth Scott) has come home to the small desert town of Chuckawalla where her mother Fritzie (Mary Astor) runs the local gambling casino. Paula wants to go to work for her mother. Fritzie would prefer that Paula marry Tom Hanson (Burt Lancaster), the local deputy sherrif. Paula's attracted to Tom but isn't sure she's ready to settle down, especially as Eddie Bendix (John Hodiak) has just come to town. A gambler/gangster from the big city, Bendix and his henchman Johnny Ryan (Wendell Corey) are staying at a ranch outside of town. Years before, Bendix's wife had been killed in a mysterious auto accident on the Chuckawalla bridge, with suspicions of foul play. Paula is attracted to Eddie, and he to her, as she resembles his late wife. Fritzie is opposed to Paula's seeing Eddie, and so is a very possessive Johnny Ryan. Both (separately) plot to keep the pair apart. Eddie and Paula get together nevertheless and defiantly confront Fritzie. In a last-ditch attempt to stop them, Fritzie tells of her own past romance with Eddie. Paula leaves with Eddie nonetheless. On the way out of town the couple run into Johnny. At a roadside restaurant Johnny tells Paula the truth about Eddie—that he arranged his wife's death. Eddie shoots Johnny. Paula drives off with Eddie in pursuit. Tom joins the chase which ends with Eddie crashing his car into the Chuckawalla bridge—exactly where his wife died years before. Tom pronounces Eddie dead at the scene. Fritzie arrives and she and Paula make amends. She leaves, and Tom and Paula—also reconciled—walk off together into the setting sun. The end.

It goes without saying that the above summary provides only the most general overview of *Desert Fury*. It establishes a basis for further discussion, a point of possible entry. But it is only *one* point. Plot alone can't deal with the morass of images and sounds that calls itself *Desert Fury*. Consider, for example, the quasi-hypnotic effect created by the blindingly bright shade of blue sky behind Hodiak and Corey's heads as they stand by the bridge in the film's first scene where they enter town, or the dazed look on the face of an extra standing behind Scott in a scene in the casino. Then there's a visual *frisson* created by cutting between an actual outdoor locale and a studio set of the same place. Think of the picture window in Scott's bedroom—creating a picture-within-a-picture on a screen already chockablock with iconographical bric-a-brac. Then there's that framed black-and-white photo of Scott in Astor's office and the disturbing effect created when Scott stands astride it—which image is more "real"? All of these factors, naturally, come under the heading of "distractions" or "accidents"—they're not "meant" to be seen as narrative integers. But they're nonetheless *there*.

There too is *Desert Fury*'s advertising pitch. Itself a narrative, it runs parallel to whatever fragments of the film's actual story it chooses to disclose, playing on a series of alternate associations—roles played by the performers in the past, films *Desert Fury* hopes to recall as a possible point of appeal. And it is here that we find yet *another Desert Fury:* "A story that sweeps with sinister and growing menace thru sun-baked desert towns, luxurious ranches, colorful gambling houses to the greatest chase climax ever recorded by cameras."

Terms of Endearment

"Everyone went to the movies in the late forties," claims critic Andrew Sarris: "A disaster like the Gable-Garson *Adventure* grossed five million domestic, and musical atrocities like *Holiday in Mexico* and *The Dolly Sisters* drew lines instead of the flies they would attract today."[10] Consequently most viewers out for an evening's entertainment weren't likely to be deterred by the almost unanimously unfavorable notices *Desert Fury* received when it made its debut.

"The picture as a whole makes you think of a magnificently decorated package inside which someone has forgotten to place the gift," wrote Archer Winsten in the *New York Post*. "If you can accept all these automobiles and clothes as a substitute for a story that makes good sense, here's your picture," noted Alton Cook in the *World Telegraph*. Forty years haven't altered critical evaluations in any significant way. "Mild drama of love and mystery among gamblers, stolen by Astor in a bristling character portrayal," says the 1987 edition of Leonard Maltin's *TV Movies*.[11] Audiences exiting *Desert Fury* in 1947 would very likely have agreed with him. But these same audiences didn't in all likelihood go *in* to *Desert Fury* for Mary Astor. Their attention was directed elsewhere—to Lancaster and Scott.

Under contract to the film's producer Hal Wallis, Lizabeth Scott (born Emma Mazzo), with her dusky voice (doubtless modeled after Lauren Bacall) and wave-encrusted hair (echoing the likes of Veronica Lake) was clearly being promoted as the latest in a long line of sultry siren types. In 1941 she made her debut in an undistinguished programmer called *Frightened Lady*. After a brief hiatus she returned in *You Came Along* (1945) followed by *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946). She next made her biggest splash opposite Humphrey Bogart in *Dead Reckoning* (1947). The career of Burt Lancaster was progressing even faster at the time of *Desert Fury* though he had only two previous films to his credit—*The Killers* (1946) and *Brute Force* (1947). Inevitably *Desert Fury*'s ads boasted "That *Killers* guy and that *Dead Reckoning* dame come together as a team of dynamite-and-fire."

What the ads fail to mention is that as far as the film's scenario is concerned the "dynamite-and-fire" is supposedly between Scott and John Hodiak. Hodiak, curiously, gets top billing on the film's credits—*over* both Scott and Lancaster. One of a number of male not-quite-leads-not-quite-stars of that era, Hodiak's most notable appearances were in *Lifeboat* (1943), *Marriage is a Private Affair* (1944), and *The Harvey Girls* (1946). His *Desert Fury* billing bespeaks a canny agent. Yet no agent, however influential, could forestall the onslaught of Scott-Lancaster associations that accrued round *Desert Fury*'s ads. Couples being the coin of the cinematic realm, *Desert Fury*'s promotional copy could not help but create one.[12]

But why Scott-Lancaster rather than Scott-Hodiak as the script clearly indicates? And what about those specially posed Scott-Lancaster photos that go even further in underscoring the relationship between characters who don't truly function as a couple until the film's last few shots? These ballyhoo glossies show Scott and Lancaster in a series of dramatic clinches that have no parallel within the diegesis that calls itself *Desert Fury* (Scott resting her head on Lancaster's chest, looking up at him rapturously—the "French seam" of her blouse slightly ripped. Lancaster struggling to wrest a gun from Scott's hand, her eyes closed shut as if in an erotic reverie.) Clearly Scott-Lancaster are viewed as *appealing* in a way that Scott-Hodiak are not. Consider Scott's and Lancaster's comparably wavy hair. Consider Lancaster's strapping physique in comparison to Hodiak's, particularly as the latter's far less impressive chest is put on open display in a scene where Scott finds him taking the sun. What's going on here?

John Hodiak in *Desert Fury* offers us the spectacle of cinema at its most paradoxical. Lancaster is Hodiak's obvious superior on every level. How can Lizabeth Scott even so much as *think* of preferring John to Burt? One tries to imagine what the film might have been like had the contest been—for want of a better term—more evenly balanced. Imagine, for example, a *Desert Fury* with Kirk Douglas in the Hodiak role.[13] It certainly would have been a logical choice. Douglas was in fact posed between Scott and Lancaster in their next film, *I Walk Alone*. However, the center of *I Walk Alone* is Lancaster's character not Scott's, and the Douglas character in that film is a wily on-his-game ganglord, not the testy indecisive neurotic played by Hodiak in *Desert Fury*. Moreover *Desert Fury,* need we be reminded, is entirely about Lizabeth Scott.

Scott's Paula has to choose between two men—one "good," one "bad." Consequently the concise logic of Hollywood dictates the terms for this choice by making it *for* her. Plainly the casting of as uncharismatic an actor as John Hodiak serves *Desert Fury's* ends. Though the script and dialogue indicates a veritable torrent of passion flowing between Scott and Hodiak, what emerges is an almost palpable lack of lust—particularly in the scenes in which they're required to kiss. The pair set to work with the dogged determination of would-be outdoorsmen who've suddenly had a change of heart while white-water-rafting in the Rockies.

Still, Scott's comminglings with Lancaster aren't much of an improvement. They seem to salute one another like ships passing in a fog—icons of "Male" and "Female" more aware of their individual image power than any conjoined forces that might be negotiated to some other erotic end. Only when placed next to Astor does Scott really convey some sense of the passion the film's title suggests. But as far as *Desert Fury*'s plot is concerned, the Scott-Astor relationship is simply an engine driving Scott's character toward the resolution Lancaster provides. Dust-dry though it may be, this Scott-

Lancaster pairing is the plateau on which *Desert Fury* is destined to settle.[15]

Desert Fury's advertising is a lie. But this lie only serves to underscore a deeper truth. For like Poe's (and Lacan's and Derrida's) "Purloined Letter" the "message" of *Desert Fury* is always in plain sight. Even before the story begins the discrimination of "desirable" Lancaster over "undesirable" Hodiak has been set in place. The performers' particular qualities (or in this case lack of same) are slipped into the folds of the scenario like a hand in a kidskin glove. The ads aid this effort, suggesting an atmosphere redolent with danger and intrigue—as it is in the film for Scott-Hodiak but not for Scott-Lancaster. Thus the "good" couple is iconographically intermingled with the "bad" one—safety conflating with danger the better to promote the product.

This "ideal" movie couple isn't the only cozily familiar element *Desert Fury* has to offer. Reassurance also figures in the narrative's echoes of other flms. Here's a mother-daughter conflict right out of *Mildred Pierce* or *Possessed*. The recurring automobile accident recalls *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The criminal-out-of-his-element subplot harks back to *High Sierra*. The color cinematography, particularly in the scene where Scott and Lancaster go riding, recalls *Leave Her to Heaven*. And that's not all vis-à-vis the color.

"Luscious new colors will be introduced by Lizabeth Scott in her new film *Desert Town* which Hal Wallis is producing," gushes *Paramount News*.[16] "Armed with a set of artists' paints, Edith Head, Paramount's chief designer, spent several week-ends in the desert near Sedona, Arizona, where the cast of *Desert Town* was on location, in order to study some of nature's own colors." The results of her labors were the creation of no less than "16 gowns to be worn by Miss Scott in the film, which is in Technicolor." Thus the oddity of filming a minor potboiler like this one in color is explained—it's more than a melodrama, it's a fashion show.

Not surprisingly, in keeping with this newfound sense of splendor a title like *Desert Town* simply won't do anymore, and as *Paramount News* notes,[17] it's changed to *Desert Fury*. "Producer Wallis and his associate, Joseph H. Hazen, with Paramount sales and advertising

executives, decided upon the new title to underscore the strong dramatic action and emotional conflict in the story of a group of modern characters which is enacted in the colorful setting of today's desert country."

Conspicuous Consumption

Early on in *Desert Fury* Paula pulls into downtown Chuckawalla and spies two of its more well-heeled female citizens. "Window shopping?" she asks them breezily. "Yes," they reply, looking pointedly at her, "but we don't like what we see. It's too cheap." Cut to Paula looking hurt. She starts up her car and drives off in a huff, nearly knocking the two women down.

The scene establishes a major plot conflict—Paula's estrangement from the town's "upper crust" substrata, an "outsider" status that she alternately resents and enjoys (when Tom in the very next shot says he should have arrested her for her conduct she replies "It would have been worth it"). Yet at the same time the scene's meaning proceeds from another more obvious level. Like almost everything in *Desert Fury,* the subject of the scene is *shopping.*

"Come with me to Los Angeles and we'll buy some new clothes," Fritzie says to Paula, hoping to bring her out of a funk. "But I don't need any new clothes," Paula replies. "A girl always needs new clothes," says Fritzie, offering up a mother's wisdom, consumerist-Hollywood-style. And it's true, for in the world of *Desert Fury* women always require the new—clothes, adventures, backgrounds, romance. We don't need to go to Los Angeles to go shopping in *Desert Fury,* the film is *already* shopping. As *Newsweek* magazine noted, "Lizabeth Scott, impersonating a petulant daughter, changes costume so frequently that one forgets she is an actress, not a model."[18] Obviously the film makes no distinction between these dual functions. And why should it? The scene in which Paula is sent to her room to be kept away from Eddie alone involves five complete costume changes. One wonders whether this blatant "fashion pitch" was written into the script beforehand or presented itself at some later point in the production—perhaps when it was decided that Edith Head was to play a more important role than usual in *Desert Fury*'s making.

With *Desert Fury* we're deep in the heart of that Hollywood where studio "showmanship" declares that audience interest in "the clothes" carries equal—if not greater—weight with "the stars" or "the story." The clothes put so pointedly on display in *Desert Fury* are just the sort of casual "sport" ensembles an average middle-class woman in the late forties would be likely to wear. They stand in sharp contrast to the glamor duds featured in such films as *The Women* (1939), *Woman's World* (1954), *Written on the Wind* (1956), or *Funny Face* (1957). In *Desert Fury* "practical" purchases predominate. And so it goes with the "purchase" of men.

If all the "classical" cinema has to offer is a "male gaze" forever epoxied to an image of the female seen by definition as "inauthentic," then the audiences for which *Desert Fury* was expressly designed would have few means at their disposal for getting beyond the film's first scene. There's John Hodiak gazing—like so many movie males—rapturously at Lizabeth Scott as she drives up to the Chuckawalla bridge. But if his gaze is so central, why does the film continue to be in relentless pursuit of Scott irrespective of Hodiak's visual purview? Obviously someone *else* is looking at Lizabeth Scott—a female spectator whose ability to see with her own two eyes hasn't as yet been accounted for by a theory that would have us all crashing headlong into the Chuckawalla bridge along with Hodiak's wife.

The image of Lizabeth Scott in *Desert Fury* is quite plainly up on the screen for *other women* to gaze at. She is a model whose presence bespeaks make-up "secrets," hair-care "tips," a fashion "forecast." The actual relevance of this figure in relation to the lives of women in the postwar era is, naturally, open to question. But it is quite without question that the character of Paula means to address those women and their lives as directly as possible. *Desert Fury* is a "woman's picture" offering its audience the image of an *homme fatale* to parallel the *femmes fatales* of the forties *film noirs.*

As critic Barbara Deming has noted,[10] the *film noir* is in many ways something on the order of an allegorical morality play—its heroes' trafficking in criminal activity standing in for killings on the battlefields, its *femmes fatales* a paranoid evocation of soldiers' fears of returning to "unfaithful" wives and sweethearts. *Desert Fury,* dealing as it does with the postwar

zeitgeist from "a woman's point of view," highlights these problems with fewer disguises. The war's end brought with it a pool of men for women to choose from. Picking the "good" from the "bad" is *Desert Fury's* principal subject. But there is another force at play here as well—equally ideological in nature. For with the return of men came the demand for the return of women to "traditional" roles—removing them from the work force in which they had been placed of necessity during the war.

"You look kinda nice emptying out those ashtrays," Eddie tells Paula, as she adds her "woman's touch" to clear the squalor of Eddie's living arrangements with Johnny. Shortly afterward she's seen sitting at Eddie's feet in front of a roaring fireplace, reading a romance novel. That Paula *herself* is in a romance novel gives the scene an exceedingly cryptic literary *trompe l'oeil* quality—as if Alain Robbe-Grillet had momentarily hijacked the scenario. Paula's a party to an object lesson being staged for the viewer's benefit—how to recognize, organize, and direct the process of her desires along accepted social lines.

Of course, it shouldn't be forgotten, Paula has also expressed a wish for a career. But with incredible deftness *Desert Fury* forecloses this wish by tying it inextricably to Fritzie's insistence on Paula's social betterment. The job at the casino would be a step down—forever barring Paula from the social approval she guiltily craves. Only marriage to Tom would set things aright. "They've accepted you," Fritzie tells him," and in time they would accept Paula—she'd get her friends." And as with everything else in *Desert Fury* this process is all a matter of purchasing power—and consumer integrity.

Fritzie wants to "buy" Tom for Paula. His market "value" is clear. Moreover she'll sweeten the deal. She promises Tom a ranch for his pains. But Tom doesn't want to be an object of exchange, particularly in a woman's eyes. Still he knows where the social cutting edge lies—who are the dealers in this world and who are the dealt. This is why he lets Eddie go in the scene where he picks him up on the highway. Paula ends up "buying" Tom, but on her own terms—after first inspecting the "brand X" of Eddie Bendix.

Still in the midst of this buyer's market there's one bit of damaged goods that stands out in sharp relief against the background of all the others bought and sold across the film's trajectory: Johnny Ryan.

No Love for Johnny

—"Why would there be some of me apart from Eddie?"

—"Two people can't fit into one life."

—"That's what you think."

—"Someday he'll leave you."

—"He'll never leave me."

A standard bit of dialogue for a late-forties melodrama, perfectly suited for a scene in which the heroine fights for "her man," forestalling the troublesome intrusion of "another woman." The only difference is that the "other" in *Desert Fury* is male.

There's nothing *particularly* novel about the presence of a homosexual character in a postwar Hollywood film—especially a crime melodrama. Think of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) with its Joel Cairo (Peter Lorre), Mr. Gutman (Sidney Greenstreet) and his "gunsel" Wilbur (Elisha Cook, Jr.). Think too of the pair of inseparable hit men played by Lee Van Cleef and Earl Holliman in *The Big Combo* (1955). And that's not to mention George MacCready in *Gilda* (1946), John Dall and Farley Granger in *Rope* (1948), Robert Walker in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), and many other Hollywood films in which the presence of a homosexual character adds a touch of spice to an otherwise routine scenario. The difference with *Desert Fury* is the remarkable degree of specificity with which sexual status is detailed.

"I was about your age or older," Eddie tells Paula, recalling how he first met Johnny. "It was in the Automat off Times Square about two o'clock in the morning on a Saturday. I was broke, he had a couple of dollars, we got to talking. He ended up paying for my ham and eggs." "And then?" Paula inquires with expectant fascination. "I went home with him that night," Eddie continues. "I was locked out. I didn't have a place to stay. His old lady ran a boarding house. There were a couple of vacant rooms. We were together from then on."

How touching this subtle integration of the notion of "a *couple* of vacant rooms"—like the twin beds for married couples required by the Hays code (in force at the time of *Desert Fury's* making). As the immortal Inspector Truscott in Joe Orton's *Loot* remarks, "Two young men who knew each other very well, spend their

nights in *separate* beds? Asleep? It sounds highly unlikely to me." And so it is, what with Johnny snarling a terse "Getoutahere!" every time Paula so much as glances toward Eddie. Then there's his pathetic pleading to "stay" with Eddie, even after the latter has taken Johnny off his payroll. The relationship couldn't be spelled out more clearly. And it's also clear that this same relationship provides a prime source of attraction to Eddie for Paula.

Curious that such a configuration should find its way into an otherwise mundane scenario. *Desert Fury* cleanly establishes Eddie's unsuitability for Paula through his organized crime associations, the murder of his wife, and his past affair with Fritzie. Bisexuality, it would seem, would only serve to gild this lily. But as the subject of *Desert Fury* is proper sexual object-choices and social roles for American women in the postwar era, Eddie's sexual predilictions have an additional plot function. The attraction held by certain heterosexual females for bisexual males was plainly of some significance to that period's social life, otherwise a film like *Desert Fury* would have been inconceivable. Hollywood, particularly in the studio heyday of the late forties, was never in favor of the advancement of narrative strategies unfamiliar to the masses. *Desert Fury* may seem novel today, but apparently no one in the front office blinked back in 1947.

In a way *Desert Fury* was the *Making Love* of its time. Like *Desert Fury, Making Love* was designed largely in terms of female spectatorship. The clear speculation in 1982 was that the sight of two men physically intertwined might have the same voyeurist currency as that of the sight of two women. This is turn brings up the fact that lesbianism has always been regarded as well within the purview of the "gaze"—the eyes of men "legitimizing" what would otherwise be an "aberration." The same does not hold for men. The first words a homosexual hears indicative of his newly won pariah status are "What are *you* looking at?" The "you" emphasized in this rhetorical accusation serves to arrest through the sheer force of its own specification the notion that male voyeurism would even so much as *conceive* of a male object.

This voyeuristic threat plays no part in *Desert Fury*. Our views of both Hodiak and Lancaster are quite conventional in that whatever physical attractions they may possess, their power and legitimacy *as men* are their true source of sexual fascination. Likewise for Wendell Corey as Johnny. He's simply the lynch-pin of the plot—the key to its mystery. As for his expression of desire, it's ever so carefully interwoven into the film's network of dramatic conflicts. In keeping with the "classical" cinema's tendency to ground desire within a force-field of point of view shots for purposes of spectator identification, *Desert Fury* is especially scrupulous about restricting Johnny's expressions of ardor toward Eddie to two-shots in which the men appear together. The only exception to this rule is the breakfast scene mentioned previously, where Johnny pleads to stay on with Eddie at no salary. The depth of Johnny's feelings are plain for all to see, but in the exchange of looks between Johnny, Eddie, and a silent, pensively smoking Paula, they are prevented from falling within the viewer's sightline. Paula, without speaking, dominates here. It is the regulation of *her* vision that dictates the *mise-en-scène* of emotions. Johnny nonetheless leaves his mark on the narrative on another level.

It is Johnny who controls Eddie. He "created" him (as Eddie's climactic confession makes clear) and introduced him to a life of crime. It was Johnny who drove Eddie to kill his wife. "*I'm* Eddie Bendix!" he declares moments before his death. And even after death Johnny looms across the action—his final speech is repeated on the sound track as Eddie races after Paula in his car, crashing it into the Chuckawalla bridge.

"They never fixed it," Paula says to Tom, referring to the bridge's railings, shattered in the wake of the first accident and gaping open at the moment of the second. She could, of course, be referring just as well to a sociosexual schema that allows the likes of an Eddie or a Johnny. "They will [fix it] one day," says Tom, reassuring her. But forty years later, nothing about *Desert Fury,* or the culture that spawned it, has been "fixed."

Prisoner of the Desert

Just how far have we come since the fall of 1947? The bulk of *Desert Fury*'s plot (mother-daughter conflict, woman in thrall to "unsuitable" male) has long served as the stuff of television "soap opera"—both daytime and—"prime-time" variety. Fashion "pitches" have their place in this narrative schematic—recently

having revived the shoulder pads common to the late forties. Women in these mainstream scenarios are presented as having the "option" of "career" or "family"—though the bias towards domestic "choices" are plain, with attendant "guilt" over "lack of fulfillment *as a woman.*" "Having it all," is the catch-phrase surrounding this cultural cul-de-sac.

Homosexuality has likewise found its "place" as well. Once confined to the margins of experimental cinema, it's been upgraded to the tributaries of the mainstream—"art" and "independent" cinema, and over-the-counter hardcore pornography. Figures like Johnny Ryan no longer "work" here. And why should they? What role is there for a Johnny in an era of Bruce Weber blatancy, or the lip-smacking, towel-snapping sensuality of a *Top Gun*?

Johnny Ryan belongs precisely where he is—a late forties programmer called *Desert Fury*. A compendium of medium-two-shots (with a handful of long shots and close-ups for spice) ceaselessly pursuing one another round a fixed locale. Here are five figures locked inside a scenario so claustrophobic that they need not move more than a few feet before slamming into one another. Here are a series of problems to be dealt with, demands to be answered: Overbearing parents, social stigma and snobbery, dangerous acquaintances, unsuitable swains, a woman not sure about what she wants to do with her life, homosexual desire. Nothing new here. Nothing "old" either. It's the world in which we live, "brought to life" by the Cinema we love. And in our working through it all it's still possible to isolate the bases of our fascination, our frustration, our boredom, our obsession, our*selves*. But ahistorical "close analysis" can't reach it alone, nor can any other theoretical framework that deals with film solely at the level of narrative logic, or as a vast preamble to a psychoanalytic technique that can function at best only as a metaphor for cinematic interaction.

Metz seems aware of this when he writes that "the problem of the cinema is always reduplicated as a problem of the theory of the cinema and we can only only extract knowledge from what we are (what we are as persons, what we are as culture and society)."[20] But who are these persons, this culture, this society?

"Cinematic images," comments Jean-Louis

Schefer, "exercise a powerful preemption over the living being, not simply because he is made to feel present at the spectacle, but because he can't see the spectacle unless he's part of it in some way, or unless he himself is the absolute reason for the spectacle, its profoundest passion. That's the real question for cinema. It's never a partial phenomenon based on a split; it's a participatory phenomenon, generalized and indeterminate, working across *all* the objects of the spectacle. A cinematic projection has to be diffused—across the hero, and the villain, and the animals, and the objects, and the places on the screen—over the whole world. It's with the entirety of that world on screen that the spectator participates or identifies himself, and it's there that he's most sensitive to the effects of spatial dislocation, temporal distortion, and especially emotions."[21]

There is no set theoretical formulation, no royal road to chart this course of cinema. There are only a series of byways and backalleys—some connecting directly to the narrative at hand, others intersecting with advertising, commerce, and current events. Some of these routes connect. Others are cul-de-sacs. But it's only by following them that we can possibly see our way through this detritus, this Technicolor swamp, this two-penny fashion show, this absurd confluence of fixity and drift, this *Desert Fury*.

NOTES

1. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 13.
2. Ibid., p. 15.
3. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema,* Indiana University Press, 1981. Particularly the essay "The Question Oshima."
4. "We wanted to re-read Ford, not Huston, to dissect Bresson and not René Clair, to psychoanalyze Bazin and not Pauline Kael," T. L. French, "Les Cahiers du Cinema 1968-1977, Interview with Serge Daney," *The Thousand Eyes #2.*
5. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film,* University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
6. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* Volume 15, Number 3, Autumn 1975.
7. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema,* Indiana University Press, 1984.
8. "What interests me . . . in Lizabeth Scott films," Alloway writes, "are those properties specific to popular movies which can be validated by comparison with other films and other mass media." Lawrence Alloway, *Violent America: The Movies 1946-1964,* The Museum of Modern Art, 1971.
9. "A still from a 40's movie called *Shockproof* had a fascination that I spent some time analyzing. Everything in the photograph converged on a girl in a 'new look' coat who stared out slightly to the right of the camera. A very wide-angle lens must have been used because the perspective seemed distorted, but the disquiet of the scene was due to other factors. It was a film set, not a real room, so wall surfaces were not explicitly conjoined; and the lighting came from several different sources. Since the scale of the room had not been unreasonably enlarged, as one might expect from the use of a wide-angle lens, it could be assumed that false perspective had been introduced to counteract its effect . . . , yet the foreground remained emphatically close and the recession extreme. All this contributed more to the foreboding atmosphere than the casually observed body lying on the floor, partially concealed by a desk. The three collages . . . are about this image of an interior space—ominous, provocative, ambiguous; with the lingering residues of decorative style that any inhabited space collects. A confrontation with which the spectator is familiar yet not at ease." (*Richard Hamilton,* The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1973, page 46) "I've been looking at the catalogue. There is a wonderful clarity in Hamilton's work. And looking at these pictures some things have come back to me—Pat Knight's rather angular handsomeness, the pale lipstick face, with eyes trying to hide something, and an attitude of sameness about her against the changing backgrounds and melodramatic action." (*Sirk On Sirk* by Jon Halliday, The Viking Press, New York, 1972, page 79.)
10. "Pop! Go the Movies," *Moviegoer* #2, Spring, 1964.
11. *Leonard Maltin's TV Movies and Video Guide,* 1987 Edition, Signet Books.
12. In his video presentation *L'Image du Cinéma,* Raymond Bellour provocatively describes the cinema as a "machine that produces couples."
13. See John O. Thompson, "Screen Acting and the Commutation Test," *Screen,* Volume 19, Number 2, Summer, 1978.
14. And even this plateau is in a sense provisional, for Scott and Lancaster—dressed in their costumes from *Desert Fury*—make an appearance in *Variety Girl,* another 1947 Paramount release. Directed by George Marshall, *Variety Girl* is a revue-style musical—ostensibly about the charitable organization "The Variety Clubs of America"—thrown together much along the lines of such wartime musical reviews as *Thank Your Lucky Stars, Stage Door Canteen,* or *Star Spangled Rhythm.* A slim plot (coscripted by Frank Tashlin) follows the adventures of Olga San Juan and Mary Hatcher in Hollywood as an excuse to showcase Paramount stars and personalities (among those making cameos: Ray Milland, Paulette Goddard, Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, Alan Ladd, Dorothy Lamour). The film's finale is a nightclub show with a carnival motif. Ringmaster William Demerest takes us to one exhibit featuring "Buffalo Burt Lancaster and Lizabeth 'Texas' Scott." Lancaster is to shoot a pair of cigarettes out of Scott's mouth from over his shoulder, using a mirror. "Stop breathing," he tells her. "Who's breathing?" she asks. The camera is on Lancaster when he shoots. He turns about looking disappointed. He walks over to where Scott was standing. The space is empty. He looks down indicating he has felled her. He takes a card and places it on a post nearby. It reads "Girl Wanted."
15. *Paramount News,* September 23, 1946.
16. *Paramount News,* November 11, 1946.
17. "No, My Desert Daughter," *Newsweek,* September 15, 1947.
18. *Running Away from Myself: A Dream Portrait of America Drawn from the Films of the 40's,* Grossman Publishers, 1969.
19. "We've been begging them on our knees—I mentioned previously women analysts—to try to tell us, well, not a word! Never been able to get anything out of them," Jacques Lacan, *Le Seminaire* Volume XX, *Encore,* Editions du Seuil, 1975, page 69.
20. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* Indiana University Press, 1982, page 5.
21. Paul Smith, "Our Written Experience of the Cinema: An Interview with Jean-Louis Schefer," *Enclitic* Volume VI, Number 2, Fall, 1982.

SCOTT MacDONALD

Southern Exposure:

An Interview with Ross McElwee

During the Italian Renaissance, schools of painting came to be identified with particular cities. In recent decades something similar has been occurring in North America, where "schools" of independent film-making have become identified with specific places. San Francisco, for example, has been a center for surreal forms of avant-garde cinema. For a time, New York (and subsequently Buffalo/Toronto) was identified with what had come to be called "structural film-making." Perhaps the most persistent school of independent cinema, however, has for three decades found a home in Boston: *cinéma vérité.* Many of the leading *vérité* film-makers—Ricky Leacock, the Maysles Brothers, Frederick Wiseman, Ed Pincus—have had and continue to have crucial ties with Boston. Over the years, the *cinéma vérité* procedure (a hand-carried 16mm rig, hand-carried tape-recording equipment for sync sound, a one- or two-person crew) has been articulated in a variety of forms within a continually developing history. For a time, the assumption of a number of the prime movers of *cinéma vérité* was that the value of the procedure was precisely its ability to capture events without the intrusion of the film-maker: the film-maker's persona, either in a visual embodiment or in narration, was to be avoided at all costs.

By the 1970s, however, a reaction to this position was occurring: men and women (Ed Pincus, Martha Coolidge, Amalie Rothschild, Alfred Guzzetti, others) were carrying 16mm cameras and tape recorders into their domestic environments to see what they could discover. Even within this more personalized kind of *cinéma vérité,* a good bit of articulation has been possible. One of the most interesting recent developments has occurred in a series of films by Ross McElwee, a native of Charlotte, North Carolina, who studied filmmaking at MIT with Leacock and Pincus, and has taught at Harvard. Since arriving at MIT McElwee has completed five films: *Charleen* (1978), an extended portrait of Charleen Swansea, a friend and ex-teacher whose home became a haven for young painters, writers, and musicians—"a place like no other in the South I'd ever seen"; *Space Coast* (1978, co-made with Michel Negroponte), a portrait of three residents of Cape Canaveral, Florida: Mary Bubb, a local newspaper reporter who had witnessed 1600 consecutive launches, "Papa" John Murphy, an ex-maintenance man turned motorcycle gang guru, and Willy Womak, small-time construction company owner and clown-host for a local kids show (Jim Hoberman called *Space Coast* a "neorealist gong show"); *Resident Exile* (1981, also co-made with Negroponte), a portrait of an Iranian exile, tortured under the Shah's regime, living in the U.S. during the hostage crisis; *Backyard* (1982), McElwee's portrait of his home in Charlotte; and *Sherman's March: A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South during an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation* (1985), a record of McElwee's travels in the South, and the women he meets along the route General Sherman took during the Civil War. (See review in *FQ,* Spring 1987.)

In *Backyard,* McElwee's presence within the situations he records is, for the most part, similar to our sense of the film-maker's presence in many earlier domestic *cinéma vérité* films: the world recorded simply surrounds the film-maker and camera, and it's obvious that the people filmed are very aware of the camera's intrusion into their lives. But in some instances McElwee goes further: he introduces himself as a character within the imagery; we see him as we hear him comment about himself and his life. And just as important, he sometimes takes conversational actions which revise his relationships with the people he's talking with *as he is filming.* In other words, the camera is not simply recording McElwee's domestic life, it is wit-

nessing changes in his life made possible, in part, by the camera's presence.

In *Sherman's March* this more complex presence has become the central catalyst for the film. We get to know McElwee's (or McElwee's filmic persona's) hopes, concerns, nightmares; and we are behind the camera with McElwee as he uses the film-making process to forge new relationships and to revise previously important relationships. As is true in many literary first-person narratives, McElwee's approach in *Sherman's March* is simultaneously very revealing and somewhat mysterious: the candidness of the scenes is frequently startling, but the more the film—and McElwee-as-narrator—reveals, the more we realize that there are many aspects of the relationships he is recording that we are not privy to. We cannot help but wonder about the narrator as we experience things with him.

McElwee's films are also interesting as portraits of the contemporary South. *Charleen, Backyard,* and *Sherman's March* expose the complexity of Southern race relations from the inside, with a subtlety, a directness, and a humanity we rarely see in film or anywhere else. The oppression of black people is often obvious in the films, but so is the diversity of experiences blacks and whites share in this part of the nation where the races have lived longer and more intimately together than anywhere else on this continent.

McElwee and I talked on February 14, 1987 and subsequently fleshed out the interview by exchanging tapes.

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Could you talk about your educational background and about how you got into film-making?

When I was in high school and then in college as an undergraduate, creative writing was what I wanted to do. For a couple of semesters I worked with novelist John Hawkes who teaches at Brown. Then during my last year in college I took still photography courses at the Rhode Island School of Design. I met students there who were making a film, and watched them work on the moviola. That got me thinking about the process of putting a film together. I went to student screenings at RISD, and I guess that's when I first though about film-making as something an ordinary mortal could do. Also when I was in college, I saw *Primary,* Richard Leacock's film about the 1960 Humphrey-Kennedy race in Minnesota, and Wiseman's *Titicut Follies,* about the insane asylum in Massachusetts. Those two films stuck with me. They represented a very different approach to film-making. There was something gritty and startling about their attempts to capture real life. Also, the notion that there wasn't a large film crew, just two or three individuals out exploring the world and filming it, appealed to me in some vague sense. But I didn't really act on these feelings until close to two years later.

I saw *Touch of Evil* for the first time in Paris when I was 22 or 23, at the Cinémathèque Française, and was dazzled by the opening shot where the camera tracks across the Mexican border. I suddenly had a kind of satori about the energy and magic of film-making. Later, I realized that by being a documentary film-maker, I could satisfy my curiosity about the real world *and* I could indulge in that magical experience of presenting a film to that dark room full of people. I came back to North Carolina after having seen the Orson Welles film. It took awhile, but I got a summer job as a television cameraman at a station in Charlotte.

I quit that job after about a year and went to Stanford's summer film institute for three weeks of intensive film-making. I made a couple of short Super-8 films and a 16mm film there and then, through a producer friend, got a job as an assistant cameraman for *Bill Moyers' Journal,* on PBS. Basically all I did was load magazines for the cameraman. The shows weren't very exciting filmically (the Moyers series used a formula that centered on interviews and was heavily narrated), but I learned things and made a living for a year.

After that I applied to MIT's Film Section. MIT didn't have an official graduate program at the time—the primary thing was that Richard Leacock was there, and so was Ed Pincus. Here were these two film-makers, both doing unscripted, noncommercial documentaries, films that weren't intended to fit into the Industry in a particular way. It appealed to me a lot. I ended up in the graduate program the following September.

Students were pretty much on their own. Leacock and Pincus were available, but the curriculum was pretty unstructured. We had access

to lightweight portable 16mm rigs. They'd give us these rigs for a month at a time and say, "Get lost. Come back when you've got a film." That was terrific. Apparently it isn't that easy at all schools to have access to equipment for extended periods. For this kind of film-making you need to be able to shoot for weeks at a time in order to garner the kind of footage that can be shaped into a movie. By the end of two years I'd shot *Charleen,* which was my first real film.

I'd also shot footage for *Backyard* (which wasn't completed until a good bit later) and for *Space Coast,* which was finished after I officially left MIT. I was paranoid about not having access to camera equipment—not being able to afford it—once I left MIT, so I tried to stockpile footage for as many films as I could—thinking that somehow I could always wangle access to editing tables later.

Like several of your later films, Charleen *seems, in part, a portrait of the South. Is that what you had in mind?*

I had originally thought that the film might be even more a portrait of the South, or at least of Charlotte, North Carolina, with Charleen as a witty tour guide. I wasn't at all sure that the film would be an intimate portrait of Charleen herself, though I hoped this would be the case. As it turned out, Charleen enjoyed being filmed and was a natural performer, in the sense that even though it was simply her own life that she was performing, she always performed it with a certain elan that was very "filmable." She enjoyed revealing her life to me and the camera. As a result, much of the Southern detail simply got eclipsed by Charleen herself.

Still, as you suggest, there is a latent portrait of the South in the film—maybe more a sketch than a portrait. I think the way interactions between blacks and whites are captured is interesting, with Charleen usually being the catalyst for such interaction. She repeatedly confronts whites with their own racism, and blacks with their sense of separateness from whites. She's always trying to break down the barriers between blacks and whites, but never politically. It's always done for art's sake, for poetry's sake, and out of an intense enthusiasm and love for her fellow human beings. And fortunately, it's nearly always done with a great sense of humor and verve, which prevents her passions from being self-righteously political or moralistic. She draws people out and confronts them

CHARLEEN. *(McElwee's films are distributed by First Run Features, 152 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014.)*

with their own racial insecurities—and in the South, those insecurities are rampant for both blacks and whites.

By the time you made Charleen, *there was already a group of films made in the early to mid 1970s by Amalie Rothschild (*Nana, Mom and Me*), Martha Coolidge (*David: Off and On*), and others, in which the film-makers took their cameras into their domestic environments. Had you seen these films?*

I saw *Nana, Mom and Me* after I left MIT, but there were other films that were much more important as influences. Jeff Kreines and Joel DeMott had spent time at MIT and their films were definitely influential for me. And Pincus's later films, especially *Life and Other Anxieties* and *Diaries,* which was a five-year portrait of his marriage.

Actually Diaries *is in some ways the closest thing I know to* Sherman's March.

I'm sure I was influenced by it in all kinds of ways.

Space Coast *is much more detached than*

Charleen *since you don't know the people except while you're filming them. But the most interesting scene in it for me is when the young daughter (who looks much too young to ever have had a baby, anyway) is in the phone booth calling to try to get welfare. She suddenly says something to you . . .*

She asks me, "Have they hung up on me?" And I take the phone and listen at that point.

That moment is something special. But during much of the film I'm a little uneasy about the film's stance. There's a fine line between looking into the lives of these weird people, and laughing at them.

Yes, that's the danger of this kind of filmmaking.

John Marshall's N!ai, Portrait of a !Kung Woman, *was made during the same period. How did you come to work on that remarkable film?*

There was the basic necessity to make a living. During those years (1977–1980) I didn't have any steady source of income, so I continued to take jobs as a freelance cameraman. I preferred opportunities where I could work with film-makers I respected, such as John Marshall or D. A. Pennebaker. I'd never met John, but I'd seen his work and respected it. He had been filming a !Kung settlement for a month in Namibia and though his cameraman was scheduled to leave, John felt that he did not have his film yet. I was recommended by Mark Erder, the original cinematographer, who was also from Boston. They cabled me, and I said I'd do it.

It was a complicated situation. John has a distinctive style, and I think at first he was nervous about having me shoot. He didn't know me at all; he'd never seen any of my work. Could he edit my camerawork with his and Mark's? Also, Namibia was his world, and I was coming into it cold. But it all worked out. I could tell you a hundred stories about the experience.

Tell me one.

Well, the day I arrived (after an exhausting 16-hour flight through Frankfurt and then south to Namibia, where we finally landed on a stretch of dirt in the middle of the Kalahari Desert), John said, "Well, let's not shoot today. Let's just show you the layout." We started walking around, and suddenly we heard a commotion. A fight had broken out between one of the !Kung men and an Ovamba worker that John had brought with him to be a cook for the camp. They were accusing the cook of having an affair with this guy's wife. There had been tension betwen !Kung people and the Ovambas to begin with, so this was a volatile situation. The argument exploded to include every member of the village; people were screaming and yelling and chanting and crying. We simply had to film it, and I didn't even know who John felt the principal people were at this point. John said, "Just shoot, shoot whatever is happening."

The !Kung are very short people, and I had this odd sense of not being there, of being invisible. An angry !Kung rushed in my direction bandying a large stick, seemingly at me, but actually in pursuit of another !Kung who happened to be next to me. But my presence was never acknowledged. I saw a grass hut shaking wildly, and I held the shot of it, and pretty soon the allegedly cuckolded husband's head breaks through the wall, like a chicken emerging from an egg. He was being restrained by two people on each arm—relatives who were trying to keep him from murdering the Ovamba cook. Meanwhile, his wife was being slapped by her mother. And it was all based on nothing but rumor. Nobody was seriously hurt. We filmed for something like seven straight hours—all stages of the argument, its dissipation, and the lamenting that followed it . . . it was an amazing experience. Some of that footage was used in *N!ai,* but edited down.

Were you there when The Gods Must Be Crazy *was being filmed?*

No. That was done before I arrived. It was wonderfully ironic that those two films were being made in the same place at the same time. They should be shown side by side. *The Gods Must Be Crazy* had its charming moments, but it was silly and condescending about the !Kung.

Backyard *is your first full-fledged portrait of the South. It centers on two themes: one is the relationship of the two races; the other is your relationship with your father and brother.*

How *Backyard* was conceived might be of interest to you. It started out as two separate films: a portrait of Clyde, the beekeeper; and a study of my brother's last summer at home before going away to medical school. I was thinking of doing a film about the difficulty of getting through four years of medical school. I

felt pretty confident that my brother would return to North Carolina and practice with my father, which he eventually did, so there would be a kind of closure to a story filmed over five or six years.

What happened was that the two separate films kept pulling toward each other like magnets, and I found I couldn't separate them. There was this interwovenness between the lives of Clyde and the other black people who worked around our house and my father and my brother; and it seemed artificial to try to pry the two stories apart. Finally I realized I had to make a film that incorporated both elements. When you're making unscripted documentaries, your preconceptions about the film you're going to make usually start out very different from the film you end up making. Then, given that I didn't have much film stock, I decided to give the film a restricted area in which to work: to let it literally be confined to my backyard, with a couple of departures to other places in the area.

The panorama of relationships between black and white people is interesting. There's the scene where your brother walks into the kitchen and kisses Lucille, the cook, in such a natural, automatic, unconscious way that I'll bet many Yankees fall out of their chairs. Then there's a scene where the new bride surveys the people and says good-bye to them before she leaves on her honeymoon: she seems totally oblivious to this black guy who, on his part, is totally involved in an almost fawningly sentimental way with her leaving. In their juxtaposition these scenes capture the surreality of the social life of the South. Also there's that scene where you visit Lucille's brother (who's had a tracheotomy) in the hospital room. His total discomfort with your presence is obvious.

Yes, he makes a gesture, a sideways move of the hand that's right on the border between being a wave, a perfectly innocent good-bye and a somewhat hostile shooing me away. This man is very depressed, and a lot of the reason he's depressed is because he's oppressed. For whatever reason (I don't know the specifics of his history), his alcoholism, growing up black in the South, never having had anything of material value, starving himself—that's what Lucille said; he's suffering from malnutrition—that gesture is very important: it's emblematic of an anger that blacks in the South want to express, but can't really because of the mutual interdependency between blacks and whites, and because of an odd sense of family. And I don't mean "family" in a sentimental way: it's not a good situation. Lucille's brother won't get angry and say, "Get the hell out of here," but at the same time he's not going to smile at me. There are plenty of angry blacks in the South now, but you still find his kind of acquiescence, and it makes me feel terrible. Certainly there's the implication in that scene of the cameraman as one more white exploiter of the black class. I am victimizing the helpless, using them as fodder for my film. If I'd cut the shot before the gesture, I would have cleaned the scene up as far as implicating myself in this idea of white domination of blacks. But then it would have been dishonest. Godard's comment about every cut being political is very true. So much depends upon where you actually chose to edit a shot.

McElwee and his father, during the shooting of BACKYARD.

The interactions between you and the black workers at the country club are loaded. Your talk with the guy you see at the flagpole in front of the Tara-looking country club building encapsulates a lot of Southern history, as does the moment where you film the black guys in the kitchen.

I read some hostility in those black kids. They're 17 or 18 years old, washing dishes for the white folks, and they're really banging those dishes around. And then the chef comes in and cocks his head, and asks me if I'm "filming all the dirt here?" It's one of those amazing little moments. It's fascinating that the black guy who has been sent out to lower the flag walks the entire distance and begins undoing the rope before he looks up and notices the flag isn't there. For me there's a lot of meaning in the downward gaze. Somehow he's learned not to

look up very often. That's very sad. And then he walks back to the side door of the building, crossing paths with the country club member in the white dinner jacket who goes in the front door . . . pure serendipity. It's the magic of these kinds of films that now and then, with a little patience, you get a very complicated scene, shot very simply, that unfolds like a flower right in front of you.

Your relationship with your father seems very problematic for you. Your father and brother seem very close because your brother is going into medicine and hopes to go into practice with your father. Your mother is no longer alive and you seem to feel left out, maybe a little bitter.

It's complex. I myself would not describe my mood as bitterness, but I can see how other people could say that. In fact, I was not unhappy with my station outside the closest family orbital ring. Orbiting is important, and I want a connection to family, but in that film I was exploiting the humor and poignancy of being just one step removed from the family as a result of choosing a lifestyle that my family couldn't quite relate to.

That opening passage where you talk about the various professions you were thinking about going into is very funny. Clearly, all the professions you list were chosen to infuriate your father's sense of what a good Southern boy ought to do. At the same time, your tone reflects your own awareness of and detachment from your earlier adolescent reaction.

It seemed to be impossible to make that film without making myself a character.

Another thing that comes across in Backyard *is a portrait of a certain sort of Southern Scottish Presbyterian life. You, your father, and your brother reveal an apparent inability, or a refusal, to really talk with each other about what's happening in your lives. There's a strange conversation with your brother at the end, when you ask him what he knows about your mother's death. It's a moment that prefigures* Sherman's March, *in that you seem to be using the camera to forge a new kind of relationship with your brother.*

That's an interesting observation.

Though he slams the door shut on the attempt.

Well, he slams it shut, but not without revealing a startling fact: that my brother, with all of his medical background and his closeness to my father, doesn't know any of the details about my mother's death. He too has never talked to my father. There's some sort of strange Scottish Presbyterian existentialism operative here: why talk about the details of the death of someone one loves; who cares what the details are, we all understand the sorrow and the absence. Also, a certain kind of politeness about not discussing unpleasant things is very Southern. I think it's partly the Scottish highlands heritage of a certain restraint in living, a feeling that men should not express emotions.

Would it be fair to say that be because of this noncommunicativeness, your family can live within this complicated society and its racial inequities without thinking much about it?

The fact that they don't talk about it doesn't mean they don't think about it, or act upon it. I'm told that when my father set up his practice in Charlotte, after finishing medical school and his residency in New York City, he was the first doctor in the city to have a desegregated waiting room. There was no fanfare, no newspaper story. (I was not told this by him but by other people.) It seemed absurd to him that black people had to sit in one room and whites in another when he was going to be operating on all of them sooner or later. He's quietly done things like that all his life. I saw them throughout my childhood. Anyway, the fact that people don't talk about racism doesn't mean they don't have strong feelings and act to eliminate it. We tend to analyze things to death up here—especially in Cambridge, which must be the self-analysis capital of the eastern half of the United States. *Sherman's March* explores the paralysis that occurs when people are talking about their emotions rather than acting on them. That's a phenomenon we're saddled with in the Northeast.

Your particular presence as a narratorial persona in Sherman's March *makes that film different from* Backyard. *I assume all the narratorial stuff in* Backyard *was recorded after the original footage.*

Yes. Painstakingly, with many, many revisions. The true chronology of when my films were finished is *Charlene, Space Coast, Resident Exile, Backyard,* and *Sherman's March.* But that's not the order in which they were shot. *Backyard* sat on the shelf for years and then was edited relatively recently. *Backyard*

was a sketch for *Sherman's March,* an experiment in how I could approach the bigger film.

Sherman's March *is often formally beautiful, which is part of what makes it sustainable for 2½ hours.* Backyard *is . . .*

Cruder. Part of the problem with *Backyard* was that I was just learning to shoot as a one-person crew. I was just getting over that odd sense of camera shyness in reverse. It takes awhile to summon the gumption to shoot people you know well, to be able to face them and talk to them as you're filming. Also, I was using a Nagra 4, a very large tape recorder: it weighs 20 pounds and I carried it slung over my shoulder. For *Sherman's March* I used a miniature Nagra SN, a very highly developed piece of recording equipment that could fit on my belt. This technological improvement made shooting much easier.

In Wiseman's films you can always see that everybody is conscious of the camera, but not so much of him personally. They're motivated to act for the apparatus of the camera, whereas in Sherman's March *and* Backyard *you know the people and have fairly complex relationships with them: the camera is more a part of you, rather than you a part of the camera. Your subjects may respond to the camera being there, but they're primarily interacting to* you *having the camera pointed at them. The interaction is more complicated. Or complicated in a different way.*

In objective detached "classical" *cinéma vérité,* you may have very strong emotional feelings about what you're shooting, but basically the world plays itself out in front of you without any of your feelings being directly represented in what you're shooting. You're detached, separated. This enables you to develop levels of complexity within a single frame, foreground/background relationships for instance. In *Space Coast* there's a shot of Papa John sitting in a chair rambling on about how he can't get a job, while in the background you can see his wife struggling to load the refrigerator with groceries; all kinds of interesting ironies and complexities are set up in that shot. When you start taking on part of the burden of the narrative and the interactions yourself, you can lose one level or dimension of this kind of complexity. The interaction begins to be simpler, more perpendicular to the camera. The complexities and interactions that once existed between people in front of you now exist between the person in front of you and yourself. Often, you're giving up the observed detail that reflects the depth and multi-leveled complexities of the world, both visually and sociologically. What you're getting instead is a self-reflective complexity, one that turns back on itself. Occasionally in *Sherman's March,* however, there are moments when I was able to step back and observe what was going on. The scene with the survivalists is an instance of that. They're not really part of my world, so I can step back and film them objectively. Ideally, I want my films to phase in and out of these two kinds of experience.

I assume your use of Ricky Leacock to narrate the opening passage of Sherman's March *is an homage to him.*

Yes, but it's an ironic homage because he pioneered a kind of film-making in which narration, didactic narration at any rate, was to be avoided at all costs. At the time, that was a break with the convention that had been established by Humphrey Jennings and the other British documentary film-makers during World War II and to some degree by Robert Flaherty, for whom Ricky was a cameraman: Flaherty's films were narrated with title cards. When I was at MIT, Ricky was always irreverent, always encouraging us to do films for ourselves, to do films that were not conceived of as commercial entities. This is not what you hear in a lot of film schools, where you're encouraged to produce films that will get you jobs in media institutions like public television, or in commercial television or Hollywood. Ricky was always very caustic and irreverent about those reasons for making films. I was really happy that he was willing to do the introduction. Ricky likes the film a lot. He's been very supportive. At one point, when my camera stopped functioning somewhere in Georgia, he airshipped me his.

When you were moving through Sherman's March, *filming people, what did you set up in advance? What did you tell people about what you would do? Did you just walk in on them?*

Pretty much I always walked in on them. Obviously, I'd steer the conversation in a certain way, and indeed that's what human dialogue is anyway, so why not let it be part of the film? I guess what my conversations have that conventional interviews don't is a serendipitous quality, an emotional charge that has something to

do with the personal connection between the subject and the film-maker. I never came with a list of questions.

Did you call ahead and prepare people?

Well, in the case of Karen, the lawyer, the last portrait in the film, I said, "Can I come and spend some time with you? I have my camera and I'll probably do some shooting. I'm making this film about women in the South and about my journey along Sherman's route." And she said, "Sure, come." In one sense she's startled when I walk in the door shooting; she hadn't quite expected that, but in general she's prepared. That scene on the porch when I'm asking her, "Where have you been for the last year? Why didn't you ever write?" is exactly as it happened. We didn't talk about it beforehand. In fact, if I had called ahead and told her I'd ask her about certain things, she'd have inevitably tried to preconceive what she was going to say, or would have said, "Well, I don't think I'm going to want to do this." It's just easier to go ahead and film.

What was the balance between how much you shot and didn't shoot when you were with people?

I think a more accurate way to think about this is that I was almost always ready to shoot. I kept the camera within reaching distance, sometimes balanced on my shoulder. Maybe *Sherman's March* took five months of shooting. I never figured it out exactly. But even between major portraits, when I was on the road, I was totally open to filming whatever might happen in a gas station or in a restaurant, or wherever. So in one sense you can count all that time as "filming time."

I'd guess the total amount of footage I actually shot was about 25 hours. I don't remember exactly. In the finished film I ended up with 2½ hours of that—a 10 or 11 to 1 filming ratio. But that other ratio, between five months and 2½ hours—that's astronomical.

I spent five or six days with Charleen [Swansea]. That was probably the shortest period overall that I spent with anybody. She's so intense, things happen so quickly with her, that I didn't need to be there long. Of course, there were also times when I'd go with her prepared to film, and film nothing because it wasn't interesting enough. I'd just relax and enjoy myself if I could.

Sherman's March *is another portrait of the South, and like the other films, it includes interesting moments of interrelationship between whites and blacks. Your conversation with the fellow whose daughter has died is especially memorable.*

It's an amazing moment. It happened totally unpredictably. I was there because the car with its mechanical woes was becoming a theme I thought I might be able to develop. It's pretty much a single unedited shot that takes you from a discussion of the car to his son to his daughter's death to my mother's death. To me, that's preferable to piecing together five different shots to create the same impression. This way you can see the emotional shift in his eyes, hear it in our voices, as we move from discussing something that's mundane to something that's of profound importance to both of us. It's the kind of thing you could never set up ahead of time because people will put up their defenses. If I'd said, "I'd like to talk a little bit with you about the death of your daughter," he might have done it, but it would not have happened organically the way it did. That's something I feel very strongly about. Another instance of this is when I'm talking to Mary, the fashion model, near the opening of the film. I haven't seen her since we were kids. We start off talking about something very superficial—when we used to play Superman—then the conversation turns to her kids, then to her feelings about divorce. Again, it's all one shot and you can track the development of the dialogue in her eyes. There's a moment of real sadness there that to me is absolutely amazing.

Did you assume from the beginning that the film was going to be a survey of Southern womanhood?

I think that the way in which the film begins to put itself on track is fairly accurately described in the film itself. I knew I didn't want to make a *Space Coast*-like documentary of the South. I thought I would do a synthesis of *Backyard* and *Space Coast:* I would film some of my relatives, but basically the film would not be so much about me as about my homeland. I would have a personality, but initially I didn't know it would be as important to the film as it turned out to be. I began filming the Scottish games, thinking, "Well, here's an interesting event." The imagery was sort of bizarre: these guys tossing huge phallic poles around, guys in kilts wrestling on the ground—all of it in the Ameri-

can South. It had a surreal quality.

The breakthrough occurred with my sister on the following day, when she said—somewhat seriously, somewhat joking—"You should use the camera as a way to meet women." She's sincerely upset about my having ended my relationships with my girlfriend, and she's looking for ways to get me back on my feet. I think she perceived me as being incapable of resurrecting my life—a lot worse off than I really was. (Obviously I had the wherewithal to get a camera on my shoulder and start filming something.) But at the point when she gave me her advice about how to use the camera, I experienced a minor epiphany. The next thing that happened was the announcement that Mary was in the neighborhood. Why not look her up *with the camera* and see what happens? The mini-portrait of Mary went well. She was gone the next day, so there was no potential for filming her more, but it was a start. And it was a microcosm of how the film might work.

Then I met Pat, who was a natural film subject. She loved being filmed, had no self-consciousness whatsoever, was somewhat outrageous, articulate, and had bizarre outlooks on life. And she had nothing to do but allow me to film her. It was perfect.

One complaint I've heard about Sherman's March *is that you center on women who are bizarre, a little wacky, maybe objects of patronizing humor.*

I see them as being independent and intelligent for the most part. But eccentric, yes. I don't see anything wrong with having chosen women who are eccentric, who are unusual. Having decided to film women who are independent in the South means they're going to have to be somewhat eccentric. The fact that they decided not to embrace the more traditional conservative values of the South, nor to accept the roles that most Southern women seem to accept, made them by definition somewhat eccentric.

You know, I hear myself saying these things and immediately feel uncomfortable. I'm not sure I have the sociological background to even begin to define who's eccentric and who's not, who's conventional and who's not. And yet I feel somehow that the women I filmed are somewhat out of the norm, and that's why I decided to film them. I can only say that I wasn't attempting to make any statement about the status of women in the South or in the United States.

Pat, in SHERMAN'S MARCH.

I felt no obligation to select a group of women who were somehow representataive of something. I think the women in the film are wonderfully individualistic; some are eccentric, some seem quite normal to me. A lot of them are struggling with life, and I'm interested in that kind of struggling. We all do it. *I'm* doing it in the film. I was interested in capturing some of that. A lot of documentaries try to package things very neatly from an ideological point of view. In some ways it leaves the viewer with a false sense that problems have been solved, points of view have been neatly defined. I think that's very dangerous. Life isn't like that.

A more valuable question to ask is, are we laughing with people or at them. Pat, the woman in search of Burt Reynolds, is an aspiring actress. Some of the things she says are quite outrageous, but she has a sense of self that in my view enables her to get away with saying the things she says. I think she's a fascinating and complicated and very unique person in the film, very entertaining, very funny; she knows that we're laughing at a lot of the things she says, but she's pleased with that fact. It's part of her way of presenting herself to the world. She's seen the film and is delighted by it. She's even had her agent circulate it to studios in California, hoping that she can get work.

It's true that a lot of the situations that I end up in or that the women end up in are humorous or comic, but it's important to have a sense of humor about life and about oneself. I see the situations as being funny, but not pathetic. I've made films that flirt with filming the pathetic in other people's lives, and it makes me very uncomfortable. I hope I've avoided doing it in *Sherman's March.*

Do you think of yourself as a Southern film-

maker? The South has not played a particularly conspicuous role in independent film-making.

I don't feel a responsibility to film the South. When I made *Backyard* and *Sherman's March,* the South seemed very rich in possibilities, and as you say, not so many other people have explored the South. I'm glad that you've asked this question because I do think that aspect of *Sherman's March* often gets overlooked. It's not merely an autobiographical film; it's a film about a region, to some degree about a way of life. I don't think I would be satisfied doing purely ethnographic films of the South. There are certainly film-makers who choose to do that. There are a number of documentaries which deal with the customs, the rituals, and the arts and crafts of the South. These themes are of peripheral interest to me. But I continue to be very interested in the way the South resists the homogenization that seems to have made most other parts of the United States indistinguishable from one another.

As to whether I consider myself to be a particularly Southern film-maker: it's not important to me that I be described that way. I'm sure I could have gone to California and made a film that in some senses would have been an equally accurate portrait of California life. But because I am from the South, I have a particular slant on the South that non-Southerners might not have, which includes having access to people and places an outsider might not come across. I take advantage of the fact that I'm Southern in making my films, but I don't really think of myself as a Southern film-maker, and I hope that the films I've made are of interest to people outside the South. Of course, there is a tradition of Southern fiction (Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe . . .), and I think that the label as used there to indicate a genre of literature that was created by writers from the South, but which transcends the region, transcends the label of "Southern"—that's what I'm striving for.

The parallel between Sherman's march through the South and yours suggests that you also think of yourself as a Northerner.

I am trying to draw a parallel between Sherman and myself, which is accurate in some ways and comically ironic (I hope) in other ways. I do have some things in common with Sherman although some of the parallels have been reversed. He's a Northerner who was coming down South; I'm a Southerner who went up North. But I also take it a step further and posit myself in the role of an exiled Southerner living up North who returns to the South again. I both identify with Sherman and find my personality and what my life stands for as being in contra-distinction to what Sherman stood for. I both consider myself to be a Southerner *and* to no longer be a son of the South. In some sense the South is alien territory for me.

There's also a parallel in the fact that you and Sherman met mostly women.

Yes, most of the Southern troops were in Virginia at the time, with Robert E. Lee, entrenched around Richmond. Left behind were women, children, and old people. There's also the basic difference between Sherman and me in that Sherman was quite successful in his campaign. He achieved his military objectives. If one considers the purpose of my journey finding an ideal Southern woman to marry, to fall in love with, whatever, I'm unsuccessful in my "campaign." Time and time again, I meet with outright defeat or at best there's a draw.

Is there a sense in which you use the camera as a weapon? Is that an implicit parallel?

In no way am I really trying to use the camera as a weapon. But, of course, the act of filming —no matter how gently, how sensitively it's done—takes advantage of people's vulnerability. The act of filming is a violation of some sort, an invasion of privacy, in a metaphorical sense perhaps a rape of some kind, pillage of some kind. In the scene when Karen, the attorney and ERA activist, tells me to stop filming, she has to tell me not once, but three times. That suggests an indictment of the act of film-making.

The scene of Burt Reynolds at work in Charlotte is interesting, both because Reynolds is a Southern star and, from my point of view, because—ironically, since you're not allowed on the set—Sherman's March *is at least as interesting a film as he's appeared in. Did you originally plan to "invade" the set?*

At first, I did go through proper channels. Had I talked myself onto the set, I might have gotten some interesting imagery of Hollywood film-making and of the creation of the Southern hero as represented by Burt Reynolds. But even when I requested permission to be on the set, I understood that if they denied it, I would then explore the point of view of the outsider peer-

ing over the fence, or I might take a stab at going behind the scenes only to be stopped. As things turned out, I pursued both and ended up with the second, which seemed to me to work out fine. The scene is a successful emblem for the difference between two styles of film-making: the single-person documentary approach is posited against the very complicated Hollywood way of making films, where you have celebrity casts and large crews, and security forces to keep people at bay.

The way the Ross McElwee persona develops in Sherman's March *reminds me more of the literary device of creating a narrating character whom the reader does not entirely identify with, or, at least, who is different from the writer. In* Sherman's March *there's a lot you don't reveal (information about whether or not you're sexually involved with the women, for example). We get an inside view of your life,* but *you as film-maker shape what we see in such a way that we come to see you as a separate and somewhat mysterious character.*

In *Backyard* I am represented primarily through my subjective voice-over narration. You do see me in a mirror shot, and playing the piano, but those are the only times you see the film-maker. In *Sherman's March* I go a step further. I deliver monologues; I try to create an almost literary voice-over. I think this enables the film to achieve a subjectivity it wouldn't have otherwise. I could have filmed the same people in the same situations without ever having said anything or revealed anything about my personality. That film might have been interesting, but I think not as interesting as when you hear something of what the film-maker is thinking at a particular juncture in the film, and when you occasionally see the film-maker in the setting where the film is unfolding (such as at the treehouse on the island when you see me in the bunk bed). It seems to me that these things are absolutely necessary to make the film work.

It's true that I'm not explicit about my sexual involvement with the women in the film, some of whom I slept with, some of whom I didn't. It seemed to me not the point of the film to graphically render that dimension of things, even if it had been possible to do so. I think that by being respectful of the women involved in the film vis-à-vis my sexual involvement with them, the film gains more than it loses. To have been more explicit would have pushed the film into sensationalism and solipsism that ultimately would have been alienating. Also, we have to keep in mind that this is a film about real people and real events. It's a documentary, not a fiction, and there are certain issues of privacy one simply has to respect. But the tension of sexuality being alluded to and yet not directly revealed adds a subtle tension to the film that I hope works in its best interests.

McElwee (dressed as Sherman) and friends go out for a party, in SHERMAN'S MARCH.

It's also true that the Ross McElwee who's presented in the film is not a completely rendered Ross McElwee. I don't say everything about myself that I could be saying. I don't tell you everything that's on my mind. I am creating a deadpan persona. Perhaps I create a heightened sense of depression, heightened in an attempt to attain some sort of comic level. I'm creating a persona for the film that's based upon who I am, but it isn't exactly me. Of course, it's hard to make this judgment myself. It's like the problem Wittgenstein describes when he talks about how the eye can see the world but can't see itself. It's difficult to know yourself and to know how you're presenting yourself to the world.

Reviews

MELO

Directed and adapted by Alain Resnais from a play by Henry Bernstein. Photography: Charlie Van Damme, Gilbert Duhalde. Editing: Albert Jurgenson, Jean-Pierre Besnard.

Alain Resnais is an anomaly among modern film-makers, having become celebrated as an *auteur* but not as a screenwriter: his films are either adapted from literary sources or based on original scripts for which he shares no credit. His reputation as an *auteur* rests in part on his choice of scripts, in which he aims for intellectual challenge and subtle political awareness, and in part on a conspicuous directorial style that involves leaps between different times, different places, and different modes of reality. It may therefore seem hard to explain why, with *Mélo,* he has chosen to make a faithful screen version of a dated bourgeois play.[1]

Henry Bernstein's *Mélo* is a 1929 French counterpart of a "well-made" Broadway play (and indeed it was soon translated to Broadway)—a psychological drama involving a sexual triangle between bourgeois characters. Romaine (played in the film by Sabine Azéma) is married to Pierre (Pierre Arditi), leader of the Colonne orchestra, who as a student was a close friend of Marcel (André Dussolier), now a world-famous violinist. She meets Marcel for the first time when Pierre invites him to dinner, and is fascinated when he tells of his love for a woman who may or may not have cheated on him but whom he finally gave up because she lied to him. Romaine contrives a meeting with Marcel at his apartment: a pianist, she accompanies him in a Brahms sonata, and also falls helplessly in love with him. Marcel, flattered but cautious, responds; however, he is leaving for a concert tour the following day. By the time he returns, Romaine is in a desperate state: she is slowly poisoning Pierre even though she feels affection for him, and is about to be exposed by a doctor called in by Pierre's cousin Christiane, who is in love with him. Romaine writes a farewell letter to Pierre and drowns herself. Christiane (Fanny Ardant, in an uncharacteristically subdued role), who suspected both the poisoning and the affair with Marcel, is advised by a priest to say nothing to Pierre, since it would only prolong his grief. Time passes. Pierre, now married to Christiane, calls on Marcel, whom he has not seen since Romaine's funeral. He has come to the conclusion that Romaine killed herself because she fell in love with Marcel and was rejected. Marcel denies; Pierre insists. As Pierre cites more and more evidence for his conclusion, Marcel realizes that Romaine must have loved him with absolute fidelity. Overcome by emotion, he tells Pierre that he is upset because a woman he loves is breaking up with him. Pierre apologizes for his insistence, and the film ends as the two men play the Brahms sonata together.

The film begins with a hand turning the pages of a program to show the main credits; then the sounds of a theater audience accompany the image of a stage curtain (which returns at the end of each act). The curtain dissolves to reveal an obvious stage set—Romaine and Pierre's suburban back yard, where they and Marcel are dining in front of a backdrop of moon and stars. Resnais's changes to the original dialogue and stage directions are no more, and possibly less, than a theater director would make—such as the elimination of a servant and the substitution of Brahms for Lekeu. Rather than open up the action, Resnais has chosen to keep it enclosed: of three brief exterior scenes that appear in the original, he includes only two. Each of the other scenes not only retains its chronological order but unfolds in virtually unbroken real time.

In spite of all these apparent handicaps, *Mélo* is a remarkable accomplishment, and audiences both at the New York Film Festival press screening and in a New York theater were held silent by it. What accounts for its success? There is no obvious originality, as in Resnais's earliest feature films. For one thing, *Mélo* has been adapted to the screen on at least four previous occasions, three times by Paul Czinner (in French, German, and—as *Dreaming Lips* —in English) and once by Robert Land and Giorgio Simonelli (in Italian), all in the 1930s. As for Resnais's emphasis on the play's stage origins, Cocteau incorporated both the theatrical curtain and fidelity to dialogue in the 1948 adaptation of his play *Les Parents terribles.*

However, Resnais's use of the camera, lighting, editing, and other cinematic elements in *Mélo* is quite different from Cocteau's in *Les Parents terribles.* Cocteau enters the play with

MELO: *Marcel, Romaine, and Pierre in a nightclub.*

a rapid wipe from the theater curtain to a shock close-up of the father in a SCUBA mask, whereas Resnais gently discloses the back-yard set. At the end, Cocteau dollies back from the family home to depict it as a kind of gipsy caravan, and a narrative voiceover so describes it; Resnais simply dissolves from Pierre and Marcel to the final curtain. In between, though the action of *Les Parents terribles* stays within two apartments, Cocteau contrives much more variety than in *Mélo*—more movement and business with props (involving five main characters instead of three), more rapid dialogue, more frequent cutting, and bursts of ironic humor. As these contrasts imply, *Mélo* is a more rigorous and risky attempt to transfer a stage play to the screen.

Yet, paradoxically, the more closely *Mélo* is examined, the more clearly it reveals a family resemblance to Resnais's most experimental feature, *Last Year at Marienbad.* Both present frankly hermetic worlds; both make deliberate use of music; both depend on a triangle of two men and a woman. Although at first sight *Mélo* seems conservative, if not reactionary, alongside *Marienbad,* an investigation of the three areas of similarity reveals that the later film goes to even greater extremes.

In *Marienbad* the hermetic world extends to daylit exteriors; in *Mélo* it does not. The opening scene is not only nocturnal but patently located inside a studio. When Romaine first visits Marcel's apartment, she comments on the fine view from his window—which consists entirely of small panes of colored and frosted glass. The only real exteriors in *Mélo* are the two brief scenes, also nocturnal, in which Romaine commits suicide, as if only impending death can breach the walls of her world.

Despite the artifice of its acting, *Marienbad* distances itself from the stage by including excerpts from a play called *Rosmer:* however hermetic the rest of the film may be, it at least takes place outside the confines of the theater. But *Mélo* is doubly enclosed: it begins in the auditorium and then systematically immures itself on the stage. The first shot of the back yard is from stage front; then the camera moves forward and pans right as Romaine carries dishes indoors. The next shot is frontal but closer. The next two shots are angled respectively from left and right. In succeeding shots the camera alternates between wider angles to left and right, approaching the 180° line between the imaginary wings. As Marcel recounts the story of the woman he couldn't trust, the camera edges slowly across the 180° lines. Then there is a brief shot of the three characters from "upstage": in the background, where the curtain would have been, one can dimly see a studio

partition. We are not enclosed within a theatrical world within a world.

In the use of music, *Marienbad* again seems the more audacious film. It deploys a conspicuous incidental score, including organ music that accompanies images of a chamber orchestra, whereas *Mélo* offers only diegetic fragments: two brief passages from Brahms's G major violin sonata, dance music with a nightclub interlude and a few snatches of song from Pierre and Romaine. In both films, however, music exerts an influence that goes beyond the notes played or sung. The images in *Marienbad* often suggest a musical organization: rapid rhythmic cutting; flowing dolly shots like sinuous melismata; tableaux like sustained chords; and shots repeated either in succession, like musical figuration, or after a lapse of time, like a reprise. In *Mélo,* all three main characters are musicians, and music not only enters their conversation but also is associated with some of the most dramatic scenes. When Pierre collapses from the effect of Romaine's poison, he hits the keyboard of his piano, whose reverberation is prolonged through Romaine's reaction; and when, at the end of the film, Pierre visits Marcel and says he's quitting the orchestra, he again hits the piano keyboard, deliberately this time, but as if stricken by the poison of suspicion.

The most far-reaching influence of music on *Mélo* is in its structure. Whereas parts of *Marienbad* reflect musical forms, the whole of *Mélo* can be compared to a chamber piece in three movements—the three acts into which the theatrical curtain divides the film. The piece is, of course, primarily a trio for Romaine, Pierre, and Marcel, whose voices are as distinct in timber and attack as piano, bassoon, and violin. Romaine speaks with staccato rapidity; Pierre has a slower, deeper, breathier voice; Marcel sustains longer phrases than the other two by means of a soft portamento.

This comparison to a musical trio may seem fanciful, but it is strongly supported by Resnais's filming strategy. To begin with, the controlled recording of the voices allows greater precision and opportunity for nuance than would be possible on the stage. In addition, Resnais has used the varied resources of film to throw emphasis on the three main characters and their voices. In nearly every scene the background and edges of the frame are in shadow, and light falls only on the character or characters in the center of the frame. There are no close-ups of objects, however significant: the bottle of drops that Romaine uses to poison Pierre, the rose petal that she kept in memory of Marcel, the final letter she writes to Pierre are all glimpsed only in the background, in shadow.

It is likewise the characters' voices that dominate the sound track. Aside from the brief musical episodes mentioned earlier, the sound effects are sparse and muted: on-scene sounds such as footsteps and clinking glasses are virtually eliminated, while the off-scene sounds amount to four bells, one door closing, a softly barking dog, the whir of a passing car and the faint put-put of a river boat. Bernstein's dialogue plays a part, too. Though superficially realistic, it is far more carefully phrased than ordinary speech; Marcel's reminiscence, for example, involves an intricate combination of sensory and psychological detail that seems to have been inspired by his more celebrated namesake and suspicious lover, the narrator of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu.* It is not surprising that three distinct voices, carefully given prominence on the sound track, and speaking stage dialogue of stylized realism, should take on the formal and emotional power of music.

With the third area of resemblance to *Marienbad*—the triangle of two men and a woman—it should already be clear that *Mélo* gives far more substance to its three main characters. Yet Romaine, Pierre, and Marcel share one distinctive feature with the nameless characters in *Marienbad.* As Alain Robbe-Grillet has pointed out, A, M, and X have no past or future: "Elsewhere, they don't exist. As for the past the hero introduces by force into this sealed, empty world, we sense he is making it up as he goes along."[2] To a large extent, the characters in *Mélo* are also cut off from any past or future by the theatrical curtain and their stage-like hermetic world. When the dialogue refers to the past, it serves only to motivate or reinforce present events, just as X's insistence on last year does in *Marienbad.*

At the same time, as Sabine Azéma revealed at the New York Film Festival press conference, Resnais encouraged each player during rehearsals to imagine a past for his or her character. He also resisted any temptation to etiolate the characters by treating the play with irony. Thus

his deemphasis of all elements except the characters and their voices, which I cited among the film's musical qualities, also has a more direct consequence—that the characters gain an unusual density and resonance. Their bourgeois yearnings for happiness and love become a desire to break free of their hermetic world. Romaine dreams of a society where she could freely love both Pierre and Marcel; Marcel desires a relation in which he could receive (and perhaps offer) total honesty; Pierre, at the end, hopes to exorcise the past and make a fresh start. They form a triad of conflicting and complementary attributes that reflect many dimensions of the human condition. Seen in a political light, for example, Romaine reflects an impetuous revolutionary who is blind to consequences; Pierre, an innocent liberal who cannot believe in evil; Marcel, an incipient reactionary who cannot believe in good.

A summary of this detailed exploration of *Mélo* is enough to highlight Resnais's achievement. His apparently straightforward adaptation of the play reveals an extreme formal audacity; his formalism, in turn, reveals an astonishing humanity.

—WILLIAM JOHNSON

NOTES

1. It seemed reasonable to ask Resnais for *his* explanation. Since he was busy working on three films simultaneously, an associate transmitted this reply on his behalf: "As always, there is no single answer to your question. Never having believed that theater and cinema are antagonistic, [Resnais] simply wished to try the experiment of transferring a play he liked to the screen. As he worked on it, he came to the conclusion that the charm of *Mélo* would disappear if he tried to open up the play with exterior scenes."
2. Introduction to the screenplay of *Last Year at Marienbad,* translated by Richard Howard, Grove, New York, 1962.

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JAMES ROY MACBEAN, FILM QUARTERLY, SPRING 1983.

FQ's Annual Book Roundup

We present below a survey of English-language film books published during the past year. Unfortunately, we must postpone till the Fall issue not only a few titles that are still out for review, but most of the Miscellaneous category; even though many of our reviews are shorter this year, the sheer quantity of titles released has made it impossible to cover everything in one issue. As before, titles are grouped in two alphabetical-by-author series within each category: one series for longer reviews, and another for briefer listings. Annotations signed "E. C." are by Ernest Callenbach; "J. F." by John Fell; "E. D." by Edward Dimendberg.

Readers who cannot find books of interest in their bookstores may wish to dial (800) 555-1212 to see if the publisher in question has a toll-free ordering number. *Books in Print,* available in most libraries, provides mailing addresses for publishers. (We urge readers whose libraries do not carry *Film Quarterly* to call their periodicals librarian's attention to our indispensable book coverage!)

Because the Editor of *FQ* is also responsible for UC Press film books, we give below only brief summaries for UCP titles. (They can be ordered by phone: [800] UCPRESS.)

Autobiographies and Biographies

A LIFE IN MOVIES

By Michael Powell. New York: Knopf, 1987. $24.95.

Wading through 705 pages of Michael Powell's autobiography requires a commitment of time and love, matched only by Powell's own commitment to the motion pictures. The leisurely pace and many digressions are not everybody's cup of tea; however, readers willing to give themselves up to the work at hand, which seems easier during the warm summer months than during other hectic seasons, will be rewarded with an intimate view of British film-making filtered through the eyes of a charming, vibrant man whose love of life and of people colors everything he attempts.

A Life in Movies covers the first 43 years of Powell's life, up through the production of *The Red Shoes* (1948), and represents the first volume of his full autobiography. Powell is presently 82 years old. The chapter headings read like a film history book—Silent, Sound, and Color. After a warm description of family life in Kent during the early years of the twentieth century, we are treated to a novice's view of film-making, namely Powell's involvement with the production of Rex Ingram's *Mare Nostrum* at the Victorine Studios in Nice during several months of 1925. If Ingram does not exactly become a mentor, he does represent for Powell a dedication to quality films on a grand scale and clearly inflamed Powell's early passions, which had already been stimulated by large doses of film magazine reading.

From these halcyon days, we move through years of studio quickies in London. Powell, coyly honest with regard both to his own work and that of others, has little of merit to say of his early films apart from the fact that he learned the craft and had a good deal of fun. Repeatedly he eschews the ennobled notion of film art, stating, "I am a craftsman, and a craftsman I shall remain until I die." This period culminates with the production of *The Edge of the World* (1937), filmed under difficult conditions in the Shetland Islands, with an eye towards documentary realism. Clearly the high point of his early career, *The Edge of the World* became the first work to reflect Powell's personal vision, and to involve the coming together of a loyal group of dedicated, creative people; Powell is adamant about the collective process of film-making and has little regard for the excesses of *auteur* scholarship.

A vast portion of the book is taken up with the war years and a running streak of popular films which includes *The Spy in Black, 49th Parallel, One of Our Aircraft is Missing* and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp.* This section is followed by detailed information on his two less popular films, *A Canterbury Tale* and *I Know Where I'm Going,* both fondly remembered. The end of the book is given over to three important works—*A Matter of Life and*

Death, Black Narcissus and *The Red Shoes,* each which moved Powell closer to the concept of a totally "controlled" cinema, a cinema of complete artifice, planned frame by frame, resulting in a cinematic spectacle visible only on the movie screen. For Powell this was finally achieved in *The Tales of Hoffman* (1951), which is not discussed in the present volume. Powell does detail, however, the special effects used to create the remote, Indian mountaintop convent in *Black Narcissus,* artificially reproduced in the Pinewood Studios in England. Likewise, Powell provides a good deal of background on the evolution of the 17-minute ballet sequence in *The Red Shoes,* a ballet conceived for camera lens alone. It is not surprising, therefore, when Powell advises, "You can learn more from seeing 'The Dance of Hours' by Walt Disney than from spending a year glumly staring at the television screen."

A Life in Movies also treats Powell's relationship with the Hungarian writer Emeric Pressburger, with whom he worked from 1939 to 1956, forming an association unique in film history. Brought together first by Alexander Korda to work on *The Spy in Black,* the Powell/Pressburger partnership lasted through 18 films (13 jointly credited for direction, production, and screenplay) and resulted in the formation of an independent production company, The Archers, which enabled both men to exercise their creative talents to the fullest. For Powell it seems to have been a chance to experiment with the fantastical, sometimes surreal qualities of cinema (perhaps a legacy of his work on Korda's 1940 version of *The Thief of Bagdad*). This propensity for the fantastic manifested itself not simply in film content, but also in color, art design, spectacle, and special effects. Pressburger contributed the narratives and the well-honed scripts, providing a solid structure for the visual excesses. Powell leaves no doubt that the two men were truly working partners and that the duo credit was well deserved. Towards the end of the book, Powell observes, "The script is the thing, and however brilliant a director may be, he is not better than his script." Powell is also very generous in his acknowledgment of the contribution of his other coworkers, especially the art designers Alfred Junge, who worked on the early films up through *Black Narcissus,* and Hein Heckroth, who was the designer of all of the later works, and the musicians Allan Gray and Brian Easdale.

Curiosity about the Powell/Pressburger relationship arises not simply because of its rarity in film history, but also because relationships, artistic and otherwise, are always fascinating. For instance, Powell presents a winsome portrait, almost to the point of self-parody, of his attachment to Deborah Kerr. But with Pressburger, we are given only respectful compliments, leaving this reader with an unsatisfied desire for all that was left unsaid.

Powell is quite capable of pointed, engaging prose. Of his first marriage, he writes, "Her name was—but what does it matter what her name was? She was beautiful, young, strong, healthy, American—and just about the last person to be made happy by me, and vice versa." This quotation not only reveals the book's good humor and fun, but also points up something missing in the Pressburger passages.*

Powell provides his own rationale for the book and his chosen style. He muses, "I grew up with it [the movies], I grew out of it, I came back to it, I grew old with it. . . . And I will try to write it down the way it was. . . . It will, I hope, prove to be the story of a young man of the twentieth century and his Muse, his dazzling, dancing, fascinating mistress. A man who planned to write the story of his love affair, only to find out that his mistress had walked out on him. It didn't matter, he concluded—not if it made a good story, not if it was a unique story, as he honestly believed it was."

What ultimately comes through then in Powell's approach to cinema, the Powell vision, if you will. Having come from silent cinema, he concludes, "For us, a movie would always be a piece of visual entertainment with sound and dialogue heightening it." Perhaps this explains why the Powell/Pressburger films remain so vivid in our memories.

—PATRICIA BRETT ERENS

*In pursuit of further insight into the working relationship between Powell and Pressburger, I persuaded Powell to take some time away from his work on volume two of *My Life in Movies.* When queried about their differences, Powell responded, "We're entirely different. Women. I think Emeric, on the whole sees them as muses and doesn't really put a great deal of value on their contribution to a man's life. I think the opposite. No man can be any better than his mother." Then after a short pause and a thoughtful smile, he added, "I think every woman is inexhaustible." That didn't answer all of my questions, but remembering Powell's references to his "celluloid mistress," perhaps it revealed a lot after all. (Interview with Michael Powell, June 24, 1986.)

BELA BALAZS
The Man and the Artist

By Joseph Zsuffa. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987. $50.00.

A comprehensive, definitive, and long-overdue biography of the pioneer film theorist who was also a poet, playwright, scriptwriter, and filmmaker (he helped film Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light* before she began work for Hitler). His life encompassed World War I, revolution, political exile, a symbiotic friendship with György Lukács, and complicated romantic entanglements until he declared cinema to be his "great, passionate love." Zsuffa has spent a decade researching his study of this central figure in twentieth-century European culture. —E. C.

Allen, J. C. *Conrad Veidt: From* Caligari *to* Casablanca. Boxwood Press, 183 Ocean View Blvd., Pacific Grove, CA 93950, 1987. $12.50 paper. Veidt once offered to hire Josef Goebbels as a set designer (because of his achievements for Hitler) and he soon emigrated. A chatty biography. —E. C.

Alpert, Hollis. *Fellini: A Life.* New York: Paragon, 1988. $9.95 paper. Paperback reissue.

Astaire, Fred. *Steps in Time: An Autobiography.* New York: Harper and Row, 1987. $7.95 paper. Reissue of the 1959 volume.

Atkins, Irene Kahn. *Henry Koster.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow. 1987. Escaping the Nazis, Koster passed through France, Hungary, and the Netherlands before settling in Hollywood. He worked for years with his friend, protector, and collaborator Joe Pasternak, achieving enough prestige for job security with two Deanna Durbin pictures, *Three Smart Girls* and *100 Men and a Girl;* he followed Pasternak from Universal to MGM. There and soon at Fox, Koster established the reputation of a dependable contract director, first assigned to light comedies, then branching into musicals and serious investments like *The Robe* and *Desiree.* Unforgiving toward anti-Semitism, the director seems otherwise a soul of generosity and discretion, loathe still to criticize actresses for thirty- and forty-year-old incidents. He liked happy crews on his sets and happy families in his films. An interesting reoccurrence in these reminiscences is the number of American movies which sprang from earlier European ones, whether credited or not. Number 7 in The Directors Guild of America Oral History series. —J. F.

Backus, Jim, and Henny. *Forgive Us Our Digressions: An Autobiography.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. $15.95.

Bonanno, Margaret Wander. *Angela Lansbury: A Biography.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $17.95.

Bowers, Q. David. *Muriel Ostriche.* Vestal Press, 320 N. Jensen Rd., Vestal, NY 13850, 1987. $24.95, $14.95. This well illustrated and handsomely produced volume presents itself as a painstaking history of a pre-World War I film star, drawing upon her memories and memorabilia. In fact, the study has additional fascinations, mostly as a sourcebook on the Thanhouser Company of New Rochelle, NY, and as a document of the promotional skills of early journals like *Motion Picture Story Magazine,* later *Motion Picture Magazine.* Bowers quotes extensively from the press of the time as it covered both Ms. Ostriche and Thanhouser, where she made a successful series of one and two reelers, generically titled Princess Films. Synopses of these and other Thanhouser productions underline the increasingly middle-class edge that movie narrative was honing. When Thanhouser collapsed, Muriel Ostriche passed through several other studios, but still she got out of the business by 1921. In a short time, she had a lot of experiences, including five years as the Moxie Girl. Charles K. Harris, who made his money on an 1892 ballad titled *After the Ball,* starred her in a Charles K. Harris Feature Film Corporation production. Rudolf Friml once proposed, althugh he happened to be still married. By the time of her second marriage (to an architect), Jack Dempsey was a family friend, and Babe Ruth slept over on the living room sofa. It sounds like an awfully innocent world.—J. F.

Cotten, Joseph. *Vanity Will Get You Somewhere.* San Francisco: Mercury Hosue, 1988. $17.95. This volume is intriguing for its coverage of Cotten's work with Welles, especially, and contains more about his actual filming than most Hollywood autobiographies. (It appears that he wrote it himself, too.) —E. C.

De Carlo, Yvonne, with Doug Warren. *Yvonne: An Autobiography.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $17.95.

Douglas, Melvyn, and Tom Arthur. *The Autobiography of Melvyn Douglas.* Lanhan, MD: University Press of America, 1986. An unusually reflective performer, Douglas lived an equally unusual life, including marriage to Helen Gahagan Douglas, liberal Congresswoman and early victim of anti-Communist hysteria. —E. C.

Fairbanks, Douglas, Jr. *The Salad Days.* New York: Doubleday, 1988. $19.95. Childhood and youth were not so easy in the golden years of Hollywood, but Fairbanks Jr. managed to get through them and into an adulthood that included Joan Crawford, Marlene Dietrich, Rita Hayworth, even Katharine Hepburn, plus of course 75 movies. —E. C.

Gish, Lillian. *The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me.* San Francisco: Mercury House, 1988. $8.95 paperback. Reprint of the 1969 memoir.

Goldstein, Toby. *William Hurt: The Man, the Actor.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $13.95.

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Alpert, Hollis. *Fellini: A Life.* New York: Paragon, 1988. $9.95 paper. Paperback reissue.

Astaire, Fred. *Steps in Time: An Autobiography.* New York: Harper and Row, 1987. $7.95 paper. Reissue of the 1959 volume.

Atkins, Irene Kahn. *Henry Koster.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow. 1987. Escaping the Nazis, Koster passed through France, Hungary, and the Netherlands before settling in Hollywood. He worked for years with his friend, protector, and collaborator Joe Pasternak, achieving enough prestige for job security with two Deanna Durbin pictures, *Three Smart Girls* and *100 Men and a Girl;* he followed Pasternak from Universal to MGM. There and soon at Fox, Koster established the reputation of a dependable contract director, first assigned to light comedies, then branching into musicals and serious investments like *The Robe* and *Desiree.* Unforgiving toward anti-Semitism, the director seems otherwise a soul of generosity and discretion, loathe still to criticize actresses for thirty- and forty-year-old incidents. He liked happy crews on his sets and happy families in his films. An interesting reoccurrence in these reminiscences is the number of American movies which sprang from earlier European ones, whether credited or not. Number 7 in The Directors Guild of America Oral History series. —J. F.

Backus, Jim, and Henny. *Forgive Us Our Digressions: An Autobiography.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. $15.95.

Bonanno, Margaret Wander. *Angela Lansbury: A Biography.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $17.95.

Bowers, Q. David. *Muriel Ostriche.* Vestal Press, 320 N. Jensen Rd., Vestal, NY 13850, 1987. $24.95, $14.95. This well illustrated and handsomely produced volume presents itself as a painstaking history of a pre-World War I film star, drawing upon her memories and memorabilia. In fact, the study has additional fascinations, mostly as a sourcebook on the Thanhouser Company of New Rochelle, NY, and as a document of the promotional skills of early journals like *Motion Picture Story Magazine,* later *Motion Picture Magazine.* Bowers quotes extensively from the press of the time as it covered both Ms. Ostriche and Thanhouser, where she made a successful series of one and two reelers, generically titled Princess Films. Synopses of these and other Thanhouser productions underline the increasingly middle-class edge that movie narrative was honing. When Thanhouser collapsed, Muriel Ostriche passed through several other studios, but still she got out of the business by 1921. In a short time, she had a lot of experiences, including five years as the Moxie Girl. Charles K. Harris, who made his money on an 1892 ballad titled *After the Ball,* starred her in a Charles K. Harris Feature Film Corporation production. Rudolf Friml once proposed, althugh he happened to be still married. By the time of her second marriage (to an architect), Jack Dempsey was a family friend, and Babe Ruth slept over on the living room sofa. It sounds like an awfully innocent world.—J. F.

Cotten, Joseph. *Vanity Will Get You Somewhere.* San Francisco: Mercury Hosue, 1988. $17.95. This volume is intriguing for its coverage of Cotten's work with Welles, especially, and contains more about his actual filming than most Hollywood autobiographies. (It appears that he wrote it himself, too.) —E. C.

De Carlo, Yvonne, with Doug Warren. *Yvonne: An Autobiography.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $17.95.

Douglas, Melvyn, and Tom Arthur. *The Autobiography of Melvyn Douglas.* Lanhan, MD: University Press of America, 1986. An unusually reflective performer, Douglas lived an equally unusual life, including marriage to Helen Gahagan Douglas, liberal Congresswoman and early victim of anti-Communist hysteria. —E. C.

Fairbanks, Douglas, Jr. *The Salad Days.* New York: Doubleday, 1988. $19.95. Childhood and youth were not so easy in the golden years of Hollywood, but Fairbanks Jr. managed to get through them and into an adulthood that included Joan Crawford, Marlene Dietrich, Rita Hayworth, even Katharine Hepburn, plus of course 75 movies. —E. C.

Gish, Lillian. *The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me.* San Francisco: Mercury House, 1988. $8.95 paperback. Reprint of the 1969 memoir.

Goldstein, Toby. *William Hurt: The Man, the Actor.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $13.95.

Grazzini, Giovanni, ed. *Federico Fellini: Comments on Film.* Fresno: California State University Press, 1988. N.p. A translation of an Italian book, this is not just Fellini retelling probably fictitious stories of his youth, but mainly the artist reflecting on extremely interesting questions about his films, human beings in general, and his own character. (The translation, by Joseph Henry, reads beautifully.) All this, of course, couched in oblique and often funny anecdotal terms, and rounded off with plaintive observations about the declining estate of cinema in Italy—not to mention the world. —E. C.

Jaccard, Roland, ed. *Louise Brooks: Portrait of an Anti-Star.* New York: New York Zoetrope, 1986. $19.95. Translation of a French volume—essays about and by Brooks, with a lot of elegant familiar photographs and some startling new ones. —E. C.

Jeffries, J. T. *Jessica Lange: A Biography.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986. $12.95. Although this is a standard Hollywood biography, Jeffries provides many passing pleasures. Her opening chapter is called "Lives of a Blonde" and begins: "The political radicalization of great American actresses seems to exist in inverse relationship to the idiocy of their first roles. Sally Field played Gidget and a Flying Nun; Jane Fonda was Barbarella. And Jessica Lange was the girl in King Kong's fist." Interesting sidelight: Lange studied mime in Paris for several years. —E. C.

Maurer, Joan Howard. *Curly: An Illustrated Biography of the Superstooge.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1988. $14.95 paper. The daughter of Moe (who edited his autobiography) now turns to Curly; Michael Jackson contributes a foreword. A psychotherapist interviews a film editor who worked on the Stooges comedies and considered Moe morose and unhappy (he also had a painful limp). Dr. Grenner also helped the author "analyze" Moe. With many unusual photos that will entrance fans.—E. C.

McCann, Graham. *Marilyn Monroe.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988. $35.00 cloth; $11.95 paper. We are now past biographies, biographies that are really self-exposures of their authors, and various approaches to what we must now call "Marilyn Monroe," and McCann has written a sort of meta-biography. He omits the quotes, but what concerns him is the Marilyn construction process, both before and after the death of the person whose reality, like the light on Daisy's dock, becomes more and more distant and unknowable. McCann tries to apply what he feels is a feminist perspective, and he says some perceptive things, but it's difficult, after several dozen books, not to share what appears to have been the woman's own feeling—why don't they just leave her alone? —E. C.

Parrish, Robert. *Growing Up in Hollywood.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1988. $17.95 cloth; $9.95 paper. Reprint of the 1976 volume. Parrish is a practiced raconteur, and his stories are always amusing and often informative about movie-biz folkways, as well as the human condition in other locales. —E. C.

Parrish, Robert. *Hollywood Doesn't Live Here Anymore.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1988. $17.95. Miscellaneous well-told stories of a more or less well-spent life in the movie business. —E. C.

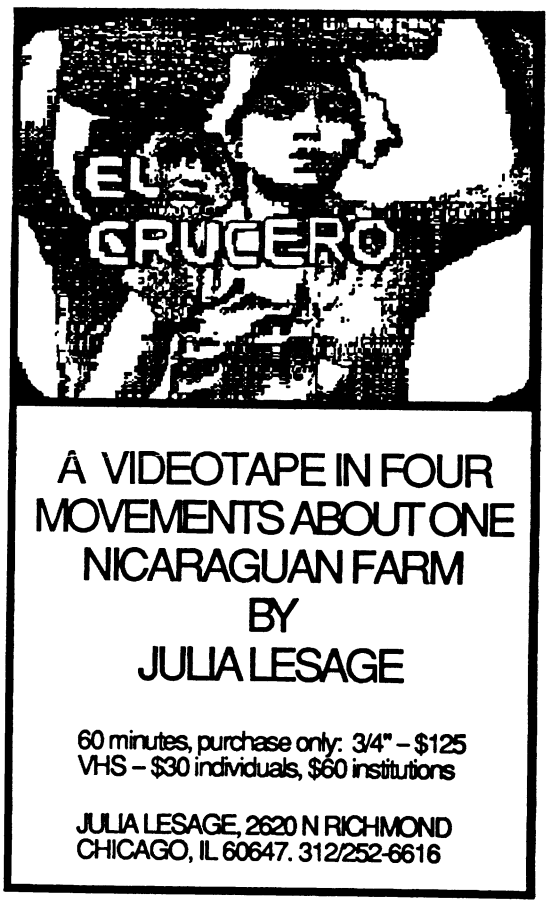
Pfaff, Jr., Eugene E., and Mark Emerson. *Meryl Streep: A Critical Biography.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987. $18.95.

Robbins, Jhan. *Yul Brynner: The Inscrutable King.* New York: Dodd, Mead, 1987. $16.95.

Vare, Ethlie Ann, and Mary Toledo. *Harrison Ford.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. $3.50 paperback.

von Sternberg, Josef. *Fun in a Chinese Laundry.* San Francisco: Mercury House, 1988. $8.95 paperback. Reprint of the 1965 autobiography.

Walker, Alexander, ed. *No Bells on Sunday: The Rachel Roberts Journals.* New York: Harper and Row, 1984. $16.50. 246 pp. Rachel Roberts (1927–1980), the Welsh actress whose best known roles were in the movies *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *This Sporting Life,* committed suicide after a life of not only triumphs but of constant worry, alcoholic addiction, residence in various sanatoria, and several suicide attempts. She seems never to have recovered from her divorce from Rex Harrison, her second husband. *No Bells* is a collection of her journal



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Walker, Alexander. *Vivien: The Life of Vivien Leigh.* New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987. $18.95.

Wayne, Jane Ellen. *Gable's Women.* New York: Prentice/Hall, 1987. $16.95. Lots of gossip.

Criticism

THREE BOOKS ON FILM COMEDY

Romantic Comedy in Hollywood, from Lubitsch to Sturges

By James Harvey. New York: Knopf, 1987

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Harvey displays familiarity with a large number of films within specific parameters, and his readiness to compare a director's many comedies to his less well-known dramatic efforts (Lubitsch's *The Man I Killed* or Leo McCarey's *Make Way for Tomorrow*) is one of its strengths. His failure to do the corresponding kinds of paper research, however, is close to fatal (a weakness emphasized by the total lack of footnotes). The writer's principal written sources are the autobiographies of—and interviews with—stars and directors. Harvey apparently didn't read much of the more astute secondary literature. He is not only unaware of William Paul's *Ernest Lubitsch's American Comedy* (1983), but his analysis of *Trouble in Paradise* pales in comparison with Paul's. While Paul grasps the intersections of sex and thievery which are central to this film, Harvey doesn't get it and ends up concluding that *Trouble in Paradise* is somehow counter to Lubitsch's comic vision. If this book was intended to find a middle ground between the popular and the serious, the awful truth is that it falls between the cracks.

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The proliferation of expensive reference works leaves book buyers in a quandary. Some books must inevitably be overlooked. This should perhaps be so with Larry Langman's *The Encyclopedia of American Film Comedy*. Not only a flawed rearrangement of material available elsewhere, it contains less information than one has a right to expect. Langman's capsule biographies are consistently less complete than those in Ephram Katz's *The Film Encyclopedia,* from which he extensively borrows. Nor is Langman's book particularly well researched. While Gehring, for example, briefly discusses the Marx Brothers' first film, *Humorisk* (1920), this debut is not mentioned in Langman's *Encyclopedia.* Moreover, David Robinson's important new information on Chaplin has been completely ignored. Instead, we're served up the same tired clichés. An encyclopedia of film comedy might seem a dubious undertaking from the outset since many actors and directors do/did not work exclusively in comedy. This book has avoided none of the potential pitfalls, is frustratingly incomplete and already out of date.

—CHARLES MUSSER

BERTOLUCCI'S DREAM LOOM
A Psychoanalytic Study

By T. Jefferson Kline. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987. $22.50.

This new investigation of Bertolucci is aptly titled: it is both a psychoanalytic approach to the director's seven major works and a criticism of cinema that depends heavily on film-as-dream theory. Kline's writing is quite dense, incorporating Bertolucci's meditations on film theory and his complex views on politics and psychology into a close reading of Oedipal structures in the films (especially interesting are the author's remarks on *Before the Revolution, The Conformist, 1900,* and *La Luna*).

A bit troublesome is the book's omnipresent psychoanalytic backdrop, particularly as it asserts the kind of cinema/dream theory, discredited after its heyday in the 1970s (when the work of Susanne Langer and others was influential), without the kind of synthesis common to most contemporary psychological methods. The Marxist component to Bertolucci's work, which would seem of major importance given the highly political nature of all of the films up to the mid-70s, is made so subservient to the psychoanalytic dimension it is almost erased. This is in marked contrast to, for example, Robert P. Kolker's study of Bertolucci which takes pains to unite the personal and the political, with an emphasis on the ideological thrust of Bertolucci's career. Kline's book, particularly in its conclusion, accepts almost off-handedly the extremely subjective and increasingly conservative nature of Bertolucci's work, with its demands for a spectator willing to "abandon" him/herself to the "unconscious" mechanisms of cinema. Since *The Last Emperor* was not yet released at the time this book was completed, its author could not appreciate the truly personal cant to Bertolucci's new work, with its concentration on the individual buffetted about by the vicissitudes of history, evacuating the dialectical approach of the earlier films. And yet this seems to underscore what the author is doing, as Kline suggests that for Bertolucci the psychological must precede the political—the difficulty here is that the former obliterates the latter.

A number of suggestive elements emerge in this study, particularly Kline's application of the Freudian death wish to Bertolucci's conception of bourgeois sexuality and culture. Problematical, however, is what seems to be a step into Jungian rather than Freudian territory for certain exegeses (*Last Tango in Paris* is discussed with reference to the Orphic myth); Kline's argument applies a Freudian reading to archetypal analysis, but there is an unnecessary reliance on metaphoric language to introduce such topics as narcissism. Kline makes use of a variety of resonations in discussing *Last Tango,* from Cocteau's *Orphée* to aspects of Marlon Brando's film career. Many of these allusions

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are illuminating and are part of the intertextual complexion of the book; taken individually, applied to associated works, they add to the argument's dimension, but as a whole they present the "dream loom" as something of a postmodern miasma.

The psychological component to Bertolucci has always been manifest, and this book exhausts what material has heretofore gone unnoticed. It is an engaging and scholarly work, particularly in its careful attention to film theory and all the important writing on Bertolucci to date. —CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

RIBBONS IN TIME

By Paul Monaco. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. $28.50 cloth, $10.95 paper.

As a title, *Ribbons in Time* has a nice ring to it, but its four chapters really try to untangle ribbons in different national cultures, with four different approaches. Fellini and Antonioni are viewed as outgrowths proceeding from, then superseding neorealism. Nothing very novel there, or in the next section devoted to four early New Wave productions. In fact, film as a touchstone to social ramifications seems to give ground to film as personal vision. New Wave auteurism "deflected interest away from the social and cultural milieu in which a movie is produced to the personal thematic choices of the director and his or her stylistic idiosyncracies" (34). "[Fellini's and Antonioni's] visions of filmmaking reflect diametrically opposed perceptions of the reality of an experience that both have shared culturally." (31)

Chapter 3 on West Germany rests in somewhat firmer ground, where Monaco groups a number of postwar films in terms of their approaches to Nazism, to the war, and to the Holocaust. This is the best essay by far, profiting from the author's earlier work (*Cinema and Society in France and Germany, 1919–1929,* his 1974 dissertation), and evidences a close familiarity with many titles inaccessible to this book's readers. Monaco's sensitivities to Germany's complicated relationships with its past are readily apparent. In the final chapter, he evaluates several American movies made since the late sixties in terms of self-serving nostalgia.

Beyond its general interest in social, political, economic, and sometimes philosophic matters, *Ribbons in Time* seems to betray no unifying methodology. The chapters work better as separate essays; consistency remains something of a problem. "Historically, pioneer movements in film art consistently have been most highly regarded abroad before they were appreciated at home" (ix), but "By 1960 every distributor in France, at least, was anxious to be able to connect the term New Wave to nearly any new release as a marketing ploy, whether it fitted or not" (53).

Monaco is certainly sensitive to visuals, although his descriptions tend toward plot synopses, which risk sins both of omission and of commission. *La Notte* "begins with Giovanni, a writer, and his wife Lydia going to visit a dying friend. After that they rush to a press reception . . ." (19) True enough, although we know that between those two sentences, Giovanni was accosted by a nymphomaniac patient. In *Breathless* Michel "is left alone in the street and tossed a revolver by a fleeing gangster chum. He can only say: 'I'm beat and I want to sleep. I can't stop thinking about her.' " (51) But we remember that Michel's act of picking up the gun was what caused the police to shoot him.

Perhaps it's just a reader's bias to wish for a little more film and a little less society in places, but how can *Hiroshima mon amour* be discussed without any mention of Marguerite Duras or indeed of the *nouveau roman*? Or *Bonnie and Clyde* without Joseph H. Lewis's 1949 *Gun Crazy*? Is Seraghina in *8-1/2* really the devil as a whore? (28)

And last a cry of pain, a *Grido,* at what must be Indiana University Press's decision to anglicize everything in sight. It's tough enough to realize that *La Strada* is 34 years old without finding it transmogrified into *The Road. Handsome Serge? The Night? The Girl Friends?* (Guess what Fellini made in 1953: *The Big Loafers.*) —JOHN FELL

ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND THE BRITISH CINEMA

By Tom Ryall. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

This book tries to cover too much ground but succeeds in casting new light on a neglected stage of Hitchcock's career. As early as 1929 "the Hitchcock touch" was a selling point for his films. Hitchcock, having moved up through

are illuminating and are part of the intertextual complexion of the book; taken individually, applied to associated works, they add to the argument's dimension, but as a whole they present the "dream loom" as something of a postmodern miasma.

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Perhaps it's just a reader's bias to wish for a little more film and a little less society in places, but how can *Hiroshima mon amour* be discussed without any mention of Marguerite Duras or indeed of the *nouveau roman*? Or *Bonnie and Clyde* without Joseph H. Lewis's 1949 *Gun Crazy*? Is Seraghina in *8-1/2* really the devil as a whore? (28)

And last a cry of pain, a *Grido,* at what must be Indiana University Press's decision to anglicize everything in sight. It's tough enough to realize that *La Strada* is 34 years old without finding it transmogrified into *The Road. Handsome Serge? The Night? The Girl Friends?* (Guess what Fellini made in 1953: *The Big Loafers.*) —JOHN FELL

ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND THE BRITISH CINEMA

By Tom Ryall. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

This book tries to cover too much ground but succeeds in casting new light on a neglected stage of Hitchcock's career. As early as 1929 "the Hitchcock touch" was a selling point for his films. Hitchcock, having moved up through

are illuminating and are part of the intertextual complexion of the book; taken individually, applied to associated works, they add to the argument's dimension, but as a whole they present the "dream loom" as something of a postmodern miasma.

The psychological component to Bertolucci has always been manifest, and this book exhausts what material has heretofore gone unnoticed. It is an engaging and scholarly work, particularly in its careful attention to film theory and all the important writing on Bertolucci to date. —CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

RIBBONS IN TIME

By Paul Monaco. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. $28.50 cloth, $10.95 paper.

As a title, *Ribbons in Time* has a nice ring to it, but its four chapters really try to untangle ribbons in different national cultures, with four different approaches. Fellini and Antonioni are viewed as outgrowths proceeding from, then superseding neorealism. Nothing very novel there, or in the next section devoted to four early New Wave productions. In fact, film as a touchstone to social ramifications seems to give ground to film as personal vision. New Wave auteurism "deflected interest away from the social and cultural milieu in which a movie is produced to the personal thematic choices of the director and his or her stylistic idiosyncracies" (34). "[Fellini's and Antonioni's] visions of filmmaking reflect diametrically opposed perceptions of the reality of an experience that both have shared culturally." (31)

Chapter 3 on West Germany rests in somewhat firmer ground, where Monaco groups a number of postwar films in terms of their approaches to Nazism, to the war, and to the Holocaust. This is the best essay by far, profiting from the author's earlier work (*Cinema and Society in France and Germany, 1919–1929,* his 1974 dissertation), and evidences a close familiarity with many titles inaccessible to this book's readers. Monaco's sensitivities to Germany's complicated relationships with its past are readily apparent. In the final chapter, he evaluates several American movies made since the late sixties in terms of self-serving nostalgia.

Beyond its general interest in social, political, economic, and sometimes philosophic matters, *Ribbons in Time* seems to betray no unifying methodology. The chapters work better as separate essays; consistency remains something of a problem. "Historically, pioneer movements in film art consistently have been most highly regarded abroad before they were appreciated at home" (ix), but "By 1960 every distributor in France, at least, was anxious to be able to connect the term New Wave to nearly any new release as a marketing ploy, whether it fitted or not" (53).

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Even so, nagging questions remain. Michael Balcon, the producer who emerges in this book as Hitchcock's ally, sponsor, and protector, as someone whose support Hitchcock really needed more than once in an already chequered career, pointed out that "hardly a film of [the thirties reflected] the agony of the times." He was quite right. No such film would have got past the British Board of Film Censors. But his indictment in the last analysis would have to *include* Hitchcock—not just the escapist Hitchcock of Ryall's "classic thriller sextet" (*The Man Who Knew Too Much, The 39 Steps, Secret Agent, Sabotage, Young and Innocent, The Lady Vanishes*) but also the later Hitchcock, six of whose American films (*Rebecca, Suspicion, The Paradine Case, Stage Fright, Dial M for Murder, Frenzy*) are set in Britain. Other films like *Notorious* and *Marnie* have resolutely "British" overtones, and such ostensibly "American" films as *Rope, The Birds* and *Family Plot* turn out to have British literary sources. It would be hard to maintain that all these manage to avoid "dress-shirts, cocktails" and the rest. To say this is not to downplay Ryall's labors, which are valuable indeed. It is simply to indicate that the complicated question of Hitchcock's "Britishness" is raised and not settled by his book, which finally tells us more about the history of the prewar British film industry, and Hitchcock's place within it, than it does about the complications and vagaries of Hitchcock himself. I wish I could shake myself free of the feeling that he is still grinning maliciously at our various efforts to "interpret" him.

—PAUL THOMAS

LAUREL AND HARDY: THE MAGIC BEHIND THE MOVIES

By Randy Skretvedt. Moonstone Press, 1987 (P. O. Box 142, Beverly Hills, CA 90213) $34.95 cloth, $14.95 paper.

All right, Laurel and Hardy's films have been analyzed to death. There have also been biographies, character studies, fan-oriented scrapbooks, etc. Skretvedt's study, however, manages to successfully incorporate all of the above into the definitive tome. What is even more important about this book is that it corrects errors found in the many previous studies, while presenting its information in the perfect writing style for this type of study: intelligent without being pretentious, entertaining without being fluffy. And the illustrations include more never-before-seen stills.

The book is first and foremost a film-by-film analysis of the duo's screen work, not unlike William K. Everson's *The Films of Laurel and Hardy*. However, unlike Everson, Skretvedt goes into detail on both good and bad films, delving beyond surface gags to find out just what made them tick. He mentions the many gags in the original script that never made it to the shooting stage, while also detailing sequences that were indeed shot but cut prior to theatrical release. Despite some earlier work on

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this subject (including Charles Barr's acute gag analysis in his *Laurel and Hardy*), Skretvedt's study gives so much more information and is so much more richly detailed that it eclipses earlier efforts.

Skretvedt is the first author to give more than cursory attention to the features that Laurel and Hardy made after leaving the Hal Roach studios. These 1941–1945 features have long been lambasted for their poor quality, past authors blaming everything from the duo's lack of enthusiasm and being "played out" to the fact that Laurel was not allowed to inject his necessary creativity in these major studio productions (for 20th Century-Fox and MGM). Skretvedt's detailed analysis for each film during this period provides greater insight into the genuine reasons for the failure of these later efforts.

In his biographical coverage, Skretvedt presents some new details regarding Laurel and Hardy's private lives (both suffered troubled marriages and other problems that could have affected their work on screen). He also offers new information regarding Laurel's conflicts with producer Hal Roach and, later, his frustration at being unable to exercise any creative control over the post-Roach features. We also get a much clearer understanding of just how much Laurel (and Hardy for that matter) injected creativity above and beyond the contributions of writers such as James Parrot, Charley Rogers, and Harry Langdon, as well as directors such as George Marshall, Leo McCarey, and George Stevens.

Finally, for buffs, Skredtvedt includes an appendix that lists actors and production personnel who helped create the Laurel and Hardy world, with one-paragraph descriptions as to their importance to a subgenre that could not have survived without them. And the author is also the first to point out, in black and white, that Oliver Hardy never said "another FINE mess . . ." Actually it was always "another NICE mess. . . ."

Authors on Laurel and Hardy have long attempted to justify placing the duo alongside Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd, while hailing their talkies alongside The Marx Brothers and W. C. Fields. Skretvedt manages to accomplish the task better than all predecessors. Passionately recommended! —JAMES L. NEIBAUR

AMERICAN HORRORS
Essays on the Modern American Horror Film

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This new compendium of essays on the horror genre shows the continued centrality of Freud to critical approaches to the *fantastique*. More particularly, Robin Wood's synthesis of Freud and Marx in his often-cited "Return of the Repressed" essay still has a special preeminence in helping to explain the horror film as cultural product. Wood's contribution to this volume—a piece entitled "Returning the Look: *Eyes of a Stranger*"—is part of the book's general project of updating and refining inquiries into the genre's most recent inflections. Wood's dialectical approach attempts to show that the slasher film (which he breaks into two categories—"teenie-kill" movies and violence-against-women films), one of the more off-putting of the genre's recent manifestations, has a radical aspect. Vera Dika undertakes a somewhat similar project in her analysis of the stalker film against the backdrop of the conservatism of the 1980s.

Among this book's more interesting pieces are Allison Graham's discussion of Brian DePalma's *Sisters, The Fury, Dressed to Kill* and *Scarface* with reference to Herbert Marcuse; J. P. Telotte's remarks on the genre's reflexivity; and Virginia Wright Wexman's study of childhood dread in *Rosemary's Baby*.The book is missing new, exhaustive studies of some of the most innovative of the "new wave" horror directors such as David Cronenberg, Wes Craven, Tobe Hooper, and Larry Cohen (comments on these directors are incorporated into various essays, although Bruce Kawin discusses Hooper's neglected *Funhouse* at some length). Overview articles such as Charles Derry's "More Dark Dreams: Some Notes on the Recent Horror Film," could be considerable expanded. The book's filmography and annotated bibliography are very useful; the latter is a fairly comprehensive list of the best horror film criticism in the past two decades—the list is expansive, including books and essays on science-fiction and other aspects of the fantastic. *American Horrors* is not nearly as definitive a collection as it could be, particularly as it tends to privilege some rather minor works of the genre. The quality of its writing is

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Branson, Clark. *Howard Hawks: A Jungian Study.* Santa Barbara, Calif.: Capra Press, 1987. $19.95; $10.95 paperback. Film-makers like George Lucas find Jungian ideas infernally handy, but they have not secured much serious attention from film scholars of recent years. Branson is no believer in false modesty; he begins by asserting of his project that Jung's psychology "may never have had a more penetrating application in a critical-humanities study." The actual operation, however, as happens too often in Jungian studies, largely reduces to a serial application of Jungian categories, with endless glosses. This nominalistic enterprise, while it occasionally matches up interesting observations of a film scene with a Jungian notion, does not produce integrated interpretations of films so much as a tedious series of equivalences or "interpretations" in the psychoanalytic sense. Branson runs through the entire Hawks *oeuvre* in painful detail. Of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,* for instance, he is capable of saying things like this: "In further ego/shadow/animus juxtaposition, as the girls go backstage, they pass a less glamorous stagehand (their animus) who is to the foreground. He moves briskly past them and onstage to change the sets. On the way to their dressing room, Lorelei accosts Louis, the head waiter, dark-clad in the foreground. . . . In the pair's dressing room, a black dress or slip lies on a chair behind and between them through part of the scene, animus-like, and matching Dorothy's hair in a way that the girls' costumes match." Mercifully, it's not all that awful, and Branson does have some points to make about the Hawks male adolescent ("weaned but fixated") and what he calls "initiation/passage" stories. The publisher has not made matters easier by printing the book without leading between lines. —E. C.

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Coppedge, Walter. *Henry King's America.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986. $17.50. One of Hollywood's true pioneers, King has long languished in the shadow of that other great poet of American pastoralism, John Ford. However, King's longevity was every bit as great as Ford's, as were many of his achievements. Coppedge has approached his subject intelligently, selecting from the great number of King's works five major films that show King's directorial skills, his genius with Americana as well as his darkening vision as the twentieth century progressed. The films studied are *Tol'able David,* King's silent pastoral classic, *Stella Dallas,* the original tribute to motherhood, remade many times but never equalled, *State Fair,* Will Rogers in the classic example of gentle Americana, *Jesse James,* the archetypal Western legend and *The Gunfighter,* King's darkly modernist Western. Each film is analyzed and discussed in detail both as to its making and its themes. Coppedge draws from a wealth of research material including, most interestingly, Henry King's oral history taken, before his death at 96, by the Director's Guild of America (let's hope Scarecrow publishes it soon in their Oral History series). The book is short, only 129 pages of text, but the author never wastes a page and his approach is novel and completely successful. A readable and scholarly introduction to an American giant. —THOMAS KING

Cumbow, Robert C. *Once Upon a Time: The Films of Sergio Leone.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. $27.50. The king of the "spaghetti westerns" is the subject of this detailed study. Cumbow is an indefatigable enthusiast for his subject, which is fitting for this first book in English on this director. How you feel about it will depend on how much you appreciate the subject and his films. The author goes to great lengths to prove Leone an auteur in the most scholarly way, not only by covering all of his films critically, historically and mythologically (Hollywood, Greco-Roman and Norse myths are invoked) but also by including long sections on such things as recurring imagery in the director's films (churches, cats, explosions, hats, etc.), listings of Leone's many long-time collaborators, and a final chapter arguing that Leone is basically a Catholic film-maker. One could say that occasionally the pretension level gets a little high, but this is a well researched, if somewhat over-intellectualized, study of a modest entertainer. —THOMAS KING

Fava, Claudio G., and Aldo Vigano. *The Films of Federico Fellini.* Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1988. $14.95 paper. Ample photos, collaged with credits, production notes, critique snippets, and prefaced

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Clark, Virginia M. *Aldous Huxley and Film.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. $19.50. A study of the screen career of Aldous Huxley which focuses upon his four major screenplays and his attitudes and experiences towards film. —E.D.

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Coppedge, Walter. *Henry King's America.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986. $17.50. One of Hollywood's true pioneers, King has long languished in the shadow of that other great poet of American pastoralism, John Ford. However, King's longevity was every bit as great as Ford's, as were many of his achievements. Coppedge has approached his subject intelligently, selecting from the great number of King's works five major films that show King's directorial skills, his genius with Americana as well as his darkening vision as the twentieth century progressed. The films studied are *Tol'able David,* King's silent pastoral classic, *Stella Dallas,* the original tribute to motherhood, remade many times but never equalled, *State Fair,* Will Rogers in the classic example of gentle Americana, *Jesse James,* the archetypal Western legend and *The Gunfighter,* King's darkly modernist Western. Each film is analyzed and discussed in detail both as to its making and its themes. Coppedge draws from a wealth of research material including, most interestingly, Henry King's oral history taken, before his death at 96, by the Director's Guild of America (let's hope Scarecrow publishes it soon in their Oral History series). The book is short, only 129 pages of text, but the author never wastes a page and his approach is novel and completely successful. A readable and scholarly introduction to an American giant. —THOMAS KING

Cumbow, Robert C. *Once Upon a Time: The Films of Sergio Leone.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. $27.50. The king of the "spaghetti westerns" is the subject of this detailed study. Cumbow is an indefatigable enthusiast for his subject, which is fitting for this first book in English on this director. How you feel about it will depend on how much you appreciate the subject and his films. The author goes to great lengths to prove Leone an auteur in the most scholarly way, not only by covering all of his films critically, historically and mythologically (Hollywood, Greco-Roman and Norse myths are invoked) but also by including long sections on such things as recurring imagery in the director's films (churches, cats, explosions, hats, etc.), listings of Leone's many long-time collaborators, and a final chapter arguing that Leone is basically a Catholic film-maker. One could say that occasionally the pretension level gets a little high, but this is a well researched, if somewhat over-intellectualized, study of a modest entertainer. —THOMAS KING

Fava, Claudio G., and Aldo Vigano. *The Films of Federico Fellini.* Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1988. $14.95 paper. Ample photos, collaged with credits, production notes, critique snippets, and prefaced

with an introduction by Fava, a long-time Fellini-watcher. —E. C.

Fowler, Douglas, ed. *The Kingdom of Dreams.* Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1987. $12.00. Selected papers from the 10th Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film.

Harris, Thomas J. *Courtroom's Finest Hour in American Cinema.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. $17.50. An unjaundiced view of the dramatic uses of the courtroom in film.

Kauffmann, Stanley. *Field of View: Film Criticism and Comment.* New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, Inc., 1986. Distrib. by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. $24.95 cloth; $10.95 paper. Kauffmann's fifth collection of reviews (all from *The New Republic*) continues his tradition of especially acute attention to performers. —E. C.

Lorentz, Pare. *Lorentz on Film: Movies 1927-1941.* Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986. [Reprint of Hopkinson and Blake 1975 ed.] Pare Lorentz was a film critic as well as the documentary producer whose credits include *The Plow that Broke the Plains* and *The River.* He chose a hundred of his columns from *Judge, Vanity Fair, McCall's* and *Town and Country* to include in this collection. He was a very good critic, as King Vidor and René Clair attest on the inside and Andrew Sarris, Stanley Kauffman, and others acclaim on the back cover. These short, funny, pungent and honest reviews evoked attack from the industry and from readers, but his editors always defended him. For a most interesting view of the best films of the thirties, this is the book to get. —AUSTIN LAMONT

Lucanio, Patrick. *Them or Us: Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987. $27.50 cloth, $12.50 paper. An attempt to validate movies the author considers "ridiculous" by subjecting them to Jungian readings in search of models of successful individuation. The most interesting reading—of *Fiend Without A Face*—makes good use of Jung's intuition that "the cerebellum and the spinal cord . . . constitute the snake." For some reason the author identifies the Griffith Observatory as Palomar in one frame enlargement; insists almost obsessively that monster movies are not horror films; and repeatedly indulges in proof by assertion, circular reasoning, and unexamined sexism. The book reduces a number of films to one or two rigid narrative formulas, then translates the result into Jungian terms—in other words, applies one formula to another. For Jungians only.

—BRUCE KAWIN

McDonald, Archie P., ed. *Shooting Stars: Heroes and Heroines of Western Film.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. The original essays in this collection focus on individual Western hero-stars, with one on women in Westerns ("The Civilizer, the Saloon Singer, and Their Modern Sister"). Ronald Reagan is included, though he only made a half dozen Westerns and his vaunted political Westernism was more suburban than frontier. The contributors are well informed and thoughtful, but the general level of critical discussion of the films is not particularly profound. —E. C.

Murray, John B. *Robert Vaughn: A Critical Study.* London: Thessaly Press, P. O. Box 130, London E11 1BP, England, 1987. £11.00. A curious mixture: mostly fan gossip, with an occasional observation about acting technique, usually inflating Vaughn's analytical approach into "auteurship." —E. C.

Neibaur, James L. *Movie Comedians: The Complete Guide.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1986. $25.95. Summary remarks on a large number of comedians, with filmographies.

Okuda, Ted. *The Monogram Checklist: The Films of Monogram Pictures Corporation, 1931-1952.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987. $31.45. Okuda admits that "one would be hard-pressed to defend the Monogram output. . . ." Fortunately, his task is simply to catalogue it. Noted: Every other Monogram western of the forties seemed to concern "landgrabbers". . . . Television figures in a screenplay as early as 1950 ("Square Dance Katy"). . . . Perhaps Okuda's most noteworthy contribution: his unearthing of long-forgotten working titles—e.g., the East Side Kids movie *Let's Get Tough!* (1942) was shot as *Little MacArthurs;* the Lugosi *Black Dragons* (1942) began life as *Yellow Menace;* and the Lugosi *The Ape Man* (1943) started out as *The Gorilla Strikes.* . . . One of the few acceptable Monogrammers was *When Strangers Marry* (1944), a very early William Castle Hitchcock imitation.

—DON WILLIS

Petri, Bruce. *A Theory of American Film: The Films and Techniques of George Stevens.* New York: Garland, 1987. $65.00. Facsimile edition of a Harvard dissertation—a brief survey of the director's career. —E. C.

Pogel, Nancy. *Woody Allen.* Boston: Twayne, 1987. $19.95. Pogel has produced a careful, comprehensive study of Allen's films up through *Hannah and Her Sisters.* It doesn't tell you anything surprising or profound about Allen's work, but it recalls good moments effectively, pays sensible attention to the structures and styles of the films, and gives a vivid sense of the working *auteur*-as-comic-deconstructionist. —E. C.

Quirk, Lawrence J. *The Complete Films of Joan Crawford.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1988. $14.95 paper. The 1968 volume has been extended to cover the few later films. The introduction, acknowledging Crawford "turned discipline into outright cruelty" toward her children, notes the success with which she developed her "essentially limited talent" and predicts her films will last in the Hollywood pantheon. —E. C.

Slide, Anthony. *Fifty Classic French Films, 1912-1982: A Pictorial Record.* New York: Dover, 1987. $11.95. Fifty films are given credits, synopses, and brief historical-critical commentary, along with lots of photos.

Slide, Anthony. *Selected Radio and Television Criticism.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. $19.50. Reprints columns on Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Milton Berle, et al.

Smith, Joseph H., and William Kerrigan. *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis, and Cinema.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. $29.50. Inspired by the work of philosopher and film theorist, Stanley Cavell, who provides the lead essay of this anthology, its ten essays apply psychoanalytic theory to films by Hitchcock, Weir, and other directors with an emphasis on questions of gender and "the melodrama of the unknown woman."—E. D.

Stover, Leon. *The Prophetic Soul: A Reading of H. G. Wells's* Things to Come. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987. $39.95. In Wells's technocratic version of socialism, the New Machine Men ran everything and sent dissidents to a gulag (Wells as late as 1938 thought highly of the re-educative potential of concentration camps). Stover makes a good case that the dread history of the twentieth century is foreshadowed in what now seems a rather silly film, often re-run with cheapo horror and sci-fi films and seen as camp. He thinks this fate a pity for a film that so openly advocates "salvation by force," but seems not to understand that while force is now only necessary on rare occasions, the "collective submission" Wells was after can be achieved through the media themselves. —E. C.

Taves, Brian. *Robert Florey, The French Expressionist.* Metuchen, NJ & London: Scarecrow, 1987. $39.50. From all appearances, director Florey had little story sense, or luck—"Florey was frustrated," Taves notes, "by the shallow scripts he was often assigned." The plots of his movies—"A," "B," and in-between—ranged, for the most part, from the ridiculous (*Hole in the Wall*) to the insipid (*Outpost in Morocco, King of Alcatraz*). With a passable script, he could turn out a decent, if unspectacular programmer (*Dangerous to Know, Dangerously They Live*). Yet, a surprising number of scenes, shots, moments from his films stick in the memory—e.g., the horror-unleashed payoffs of his two Peter Lorre thrillers, *Face behind the Mask* (1941) and *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1946). In *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), Florey, eliciting perhaps Bela Lugosi's wittiest performance, knows exactly when to track back from the actor, when to move in to extreme close-up (to underscore a leading question, accent à la Lugosi: "A *lady* in *distress*?"). At one point in the generally treacly *Face behind the Mask,* a high-angle shot from the top of a lamp post down on Lorre is used to capture, simply and poetically, his character's dejection; an unusual off-angle close shot introduces Mr. Goodwin (Moroni Olsen) in *Dangerously They Live* (1941) and suggests that he is not really the heroine's father, as he is presented to be. Stark lighting effects create mood and atmosphere in *Beast with Five Fingers* and *The Crooked Way* (1949). Perhaps the closest that Florey came to transforming a whole movie with his camera eye was with, of all movies, *Tarzan and the Mermaids* (1948), which features the usual Tarzan-vs.-some-greedy-bastards plot, but also some exhilarating location shooting. The imposing long shots and high-angle shots (and Dmitri Tiomkin's score) manage to stir up real, if intermittent kinesthetic excitement. Taves's well-documented account of Florey's career suggests that the director brought a similar visual scope and sweep to his version of *The Desert Song* (1943), unfortunately "out of circulation since the remake of 1953." The author's claim for Florey "masterpieces"—*Dangerous to Know, Face behind the Mask*—however, strikes a discordant note. Taves tries too hard, especially in his lengthy introductory essay, "An Artist in the Studio System," to justify his use of that word, "artist." His opening thematic analysis is really just a list of subjects culled from the films: expressionism, realism, "denunciations of colonialism," revivification of the dead, etc.—a long list, as if he thought that he could make a case for his director as first-rank artist by the sheer accumulation of topics. Taves is surer with individual films, such as the 1931 *Frankenstein,* which he compares to Florey's original "directorial continuity" for the film and which, he argues, owes at least as much to Florey's influence as to eventual *Frankenstein* director James Whale's. Photos effectively illustrate textual points, and a bibliography and several appendices (which include a list of all of Florey's TV work, including Golden Age "Alcoa/Goodyear Theatre" shows such as *Decoy Duck*) nicely round out the book. —DON WILLIS

Von Gurden, Kenneth. *Alec Guinness: The Films.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987 $25.95. The title of this book, with its lack of a sense of thesis, suggests a great deal about its content: a set of plot synopses of all of Guinness's films, most of which pay very little attention to the nuances of Guinness's artistry; in some instances, there is little attention paid to Guinness at all (a chapter on *The Quiller Memorandum* details the plot, production history, and changes in the film's various prints). There is little rhyme and less reason in the author's approach, demonstrated immediately by an introduction that is a biographical sketch rather than an investigation of the schools of acting and stagecraft informing Guinness. An artist as talented as Guinness simply deserves more than this. —CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

Wood, Robin. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. $12.50 paper. Paperback of 1986 collection of essays.

History

THIRD WORLD FILM MAKING AND THE WEST

By Roy Armes. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987. $35.00 cloth, $18.95 paper.

This is the first fully comprehensive account in

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—E. C.

UNITED ARTISTS
The Company That Changed the Film Industry

By Tino Balio. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987. $32.50.

What a pleasure to find such a studio history. Although the title obscures the fact, this is a sequel to Tino Balio's *United Artists: The Company Built by the Stars* (1976) and carries on the story from 1951, when surviving founders Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford had the good sense to turn over management of the company—then losing some $100,000 a *week*—to entertainment lawyers Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin.

Balio's combined volumes are the finest economic and production history of an American studio yet written—but this is unavoidably backhanded praise. Even where studio files are comparably available, as with Warner Bros., we have only partial accounts, superb though Nick Roddick's *A New Deal in Entertainment* and Rudy Behlmer's *Inside Warner Bros.* are in their different ways. Balio's initial United Artist volume was based on records he was instrumental in acquiring and organizing for the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. This sequel differs in being based on records he was freely allowed to copy from withheld post-1951 material. Among the useful appendices in both volumes are inventories to Wisconsin's UA Collection, making the books also guides for further research.

The large claim of the second volume's subtitle—"The Company That Changed the Film Industry"—is substantiated, nearly. If United Artists didn't demonstrably *prompt* Hollywood's shift from studio system toward independent production, it was at least the vanguard. Unique from its founding in 1919, a "studio" with no physical plant or stars under contract, United Artists was essentially a distribution organization which soon lost the idealism of its name. What changed with the Krim/Benjamin era was the shift to preproduction financing, giving independent producers great autonomy and freedom from notoriously inflated major studio overhead charges, in exchange for UA's distribution rights and profit sharing. The inherently risky method may have worked for reasons less economic than personal: Krim and Benjamin's management. So at least argues the brief, disastrous history of UA after their departure. For all the company's careful accounting, Balio discovers that "in reality, there wasn't much UA could do to keep producers within budget except to deal with the right people." While independent production made up only about 10% of domestic releases when Krim and Benjamin began, it had grown to 50% by 1957, and (with the exception of Universal Studios) was complete by 1970. If United Artists was admittedly a unique case outside the primary Hollywood mode of production, its story turns broadly applicable to the postwar breakdown of the studio system. And the comedy of cross-purpose management after UA's purchase by Transamerica in 1967 portends all too well the current conglomerated Hollywood. Although Balio's 1919–51 volume has some larger-than-life fascination in its portrait of silent stars-turned-moguls, this second volume is the more revealing, with UA's shifts from private company to public corporation to conglomerate cog.

The balance of statistics and narration in economic histories probably comes down to personal taste. For mine, Balio gets it about right. He dips into some backstage stories of box-office failures (*Limelight, The Greatest Story Ever Told*) and wily successes (*The Moon is Blue,* the James Bond series), only occasionally (as with a chapter on the Mirisch brothers) falling into the and-then-they-made pattern so tempting to studio histories—and readily available in Ronald Bergan's *The United Artists Story* (1986). Instead, Balio provides just enough historical context to make sense of the economics.

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one indispensable cinema periodical. It's less lively than Steven Bach's *Final Cut,* which picks up where Balio turns perfunctory, with the 1978 walkout of Krim and Benjamin (to form Orion Pictures) and the post-*Heaven's Gate* sale of United Artists to MGM. And Balio's book is on shakier ground outside Hollywood, including oddly misspelled references to Italian director Francesco Rosi and Supreme Court justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr. The chapter on sales promotion, failing to distinguish UA from standard industry practice, could as well have been omitted. But the dearth of anything remotely comparable to Balio's volumes makes these minor flaws. It's a definitive economic history, not closing off interest in United Artists but opening the way for cultural studies. Assignment #1: How did economic forces mesh with Krim's personal taste to move United Artists in the fifties away from grittier, *noir*-tinged films toward the social liberalism in Hecht-Lancaster, Kramer, and Preminger productions? Assignment #2: For all its hands-off production method, explain why United Artists too has a studio style. —SCOTT SIMMON

HOLLYWOOD GOES TO WAR

By Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black. New York: Free Press, 1987. $22.50

OWI, the Office of War Information, was a 1942 brainchild of the Roosevelt administration, supervised by a popular radio commentator with a midwestern twang named Elmer Davis. The OWI's charge was to encourage public understanding of the war, disseminating its own information and working with this country's broadcast, journalism and film enterprises. The movie connection worked out of a Hollywood office headed by Nelson Poynter.

Davis's notion of effective film liaison was simple. "The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized." (64) Poynter's strategy was to get his hands on the Los Angeles product in a scripting stage, when change was maximally possible at minimal expense. Unlike the Breen office, OWI's function was not so much censorial as it was to shape movies toward predetermined ends. In essence, this often placed the OWI staff in a tricky position, as if they were an additional rewrite team whose relation to producers and studio bosses was both tenuous and stormy. Some films, often the comic ones, simply triggered truculent objections. Should the Ale and Quail Club be shooting up a railroad car in *Palm Beach Story* when wartime transportation was so important? More often, attention centered in on the effectiveness of patriotic speeches, or how devilishly to portray the enemy, or whether upbeat endings properly illustrated class amities, racial mixture, and industrial unity. After an introductory chapter that draws largely from secondary sources, the book is extensively researched. Koppes and Black draw on period correspondence from both OWI files and studio archives. The picture that emerges is variously humorous, depressing, and silly.

Old movies always harden into unexpected artifacts, and wartime ones seem especially disposed toward petrification. In an eighties world where almost every aesthetic, social, and political nuance seems packaged with such consummate skill, 40-year-old propaganda strategies look incredibly naive. Films like *Action in the North Atlantic* and *Mr. Lucky,* let alone the *Hitler's Children* and *Beast of the Easts,* are especially vulnerable. Here, unfortunately, their textual descriptions sometimes hardly do justice to other aspects of the study. Thus "William Bendix plays a taxi driver from Brooklyn who thinks of nothing but his beloved Dodgers (he might have deserted if he knew they would desert him for California)." (259)

A further personal reservation is that some of the films involved here are still twitching. They hardly merit the book's cut-and-dried plot-character-dialogue approach which in its own way resembles the OWI's. I'm thinking of allusions in *I Walked with a Zombie,* of ironies in *Hail the Conquering Hero,* and of Canada Lee's poignant refusal to join *Lifeboat's* democracy. Some of us read these quite differently from the authors.

Hollywood Goes to War deals effectively with American racism and OWI's flexible backbone in confronting it. If New Deal liberals sometimes appear about as fuzzy-brained as the Republican National Committee considers them, perhaps they were. The book is generally even-handed across the political spectrum, including Hollywood's club-footed flirtation with its Russian ally. —JOHN FELL

one indispensable cinema periodical. It's less lively than Steven Bach's *Final Cut,* which picks up where Balio turns perfunctory, with the 1978 walkout of Krim and Benjamin (to form Orion Pictures) and the post-*Heaven's Gate* sale of United Artists to MGM. And Balio's book is on shakier ground outside Hollywood, including oddly misspelled references to Italian director Francesco Rosi and Supreme Court justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr. The chapter on sales promotion, failing to distinguish UA from standard industry practice, could as well have been omitted. But the dearth of anything remotely comparable to Balio's volumes makes these minor flaws. It's a definitive economic history, not closing off interest in United Artists but opening the way for cultural studies. Assignment #1: How did economic forces mesh with Krim's personal taste to move United Artists in the fifties away from grittier, *noir*-tinged films toward the social liberalism in Hecht-Lancaster, Kramer, and Preminger productions? Assignment #2: For all its hands-off production method, explain why United Artists too has a studio style. —SCOTT SIMMON

HOLLYWOOD GOES TO WAR

By Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black. New York: Free Press, 1987. $22.50

OWI, the Office of War Information, was a 1942 brainchild of the Roosevelt administration, supervised by a popular radio commentator with a midwestern twang named Elmer Davis. The OWI's charge was to encourage public understanding of the war, disseminating its own information and working with this country's broadcast, journalism and film enterprises. The movie connection worked out of a Hollywood office headed by Nelson Poynter.

Davis's notion of effective film liaison was simple. "The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized." (64) Poynter's strategy was to get his hands on the Los Angeles product in a scripting stage, when change was maximally possible at minimal expense. Unlike the Breen office, OWI's function was not so much censorial as it was to shape movies toward predetermined ends. In essence, this often placed the OWI staff in a tricky position, as if they were an additional rewrite team whose relation to producers and studio bosses was both tenuous and stormy. Some films, often the comic ones, simply triggered truculent objections. Should the Ale and Quail Club be shooting up a railroad car in *Palm Beach Story* when wartime transportation was so important? More often, attention centered in on the effectiveness of patriotic speeches, or how devilishly to portray the enemy, or whether upbeat endings properly illustrated class amities, racial mixture, and industrial unity. After an introductory chapter that draws largely from secondary sources, the book is extensively researched. Koppes and Black draw on period correspondence from both OWI files and studio archives. The picture that emerges is variously humorous, depressing, and silly.

Old movies always harden into unexpected artifacts, and wartime ones seem especially disposed toward petrification. In an eighties world where almost every aesthetic, social, and political nuance seems packaged with such consummate skill, 40-year-old propaganda strategies look incredibly naive. Films like *Action in the North Atlantic* and *Mr. Lucky,* let alone the *Hitler's Children* and *Beast of the Easts,* are especially vulnerable. Here, unfortunately, their textual descriptions sometimes hardly do justice to other aspects of the study. Thus "William Bendix plays a taxi driver from Brooklyn who thinks of nothing but his beloved Dodgers (he might have deserted if he knew they would desert him for California)." (259)

A further personal reservation is that some of the films involved here are still twitching. They hardly merit the book's cut-and-dried plot-character-dialogue approach which in its own way resembles the OWI's. I'm thinking of allusions in *I Walked with a Zombie,* of ironies in *Hail the Conquering Hero,* and of Canada Lee's poignant refusal to join *Lifeboat's* democracy. Some of us read these quite differently from the authors.

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WORLD CINEMA SINCE 1945

William Luhr, ed. New York: Ungar, 1987. $59.50

Forty-two years of film in thirty regions is a lot of cellulose, when you think about it. Lew Jacobs had the same time span and stayed in the US. In his first history, Paul Rotha stuck to five nations (plus three pages on Film from Other Countries) and quit with sound.

This volume runs to 660 pages of original essays from individual contributors. Its coverage includes Africa (Clyde Taylor), Mexico (Dennis West), Switzerland (Elaine Mancini), and Turkey (Ayse Franko). Most sections count from 20 to 40 pages; Bruce Kawin's article on the United States is untypically spread out at 52. With such limitations, quite understandable given the book's charge, no one can do a great deal more than design sequential narratives, organized around major directors with periodic capsule film descriptions, production notes, and interpretive asides. As a writer, Dudley Andrew could hardly be considered diffident toward other aspects of film study, but after a couple of pages of historical contextualization, his essay on France reads like the rest. In Latin America, Julianne Burton considers alternative systems of production, exhibition, and distribution in differing political economies, but she has to cover Uruguay, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, Columbia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

Seeming to luxuriate in his pagination, Kawin enumerates sci fi and horror titles of the fifties, but this is soon followed by incredible consolidation: ". . . some of the artists who came to prominence in this [experimental] movement were Jonas Mekas, Ron Rice, Bruce Conner, Bruce Baillie, Robert Nelson, George Landau, Michael Snow, Ken Jacobs, Kenneth Anger, Robert Breer, Stan Van Der Beek, Ed Emschwiller, and Jack Smith."

Faced with so many names and so many film titles (I counted 361 under *S* in the index, most of them cited only once), one is bound to wonder how *World Cinema Since 1945* will be used. The problem isn't the size of the book; it's the scope of world cinema since 1945.

—JOHN FELL

THE FIRST TYCOONS

By Richard D. MacCann. Metuchen, NJ & London: Scarecrow, 1987. $22.50 cloth, $12.50 paper.

The First Tycoons is intended primarily for undergraduates and the general reader (although specialists will also find it enjoyable). It is the first in a projected series of five books bearing the overall title *American Movies: The First Thirty Years.* Each book in this series will cover a separate aspect of American film-making between 1895 and 1925 (business framework, film directors, comedy, the great stars, the 1920s). Each book is an anthology of eye-witness accounts of important events (or sometimes snippets taken from early general histories), with short explanatory introductions by the editor of the series, Richard D. MacCann of the University of Iowa. The subject of *The First Tycoons* is the creation of the business structure which by the 1920s dominated Hollywood ("The Big Five")—and especially the visionary businessmen who created that structure.

Visionaries are strange characters. So it is not surprising that *The First Tycoons* is at its best in its first-hand descriptions, or even autobiographical accounts, of these first movie moguls and their personalities. Thus we meet in his own words the ebullient Jesse Lasky (one of the founders of Paramount), whose passion for the Wild West was fueled by the stories his grandfather told him of what it had been like on the Oregon Trail in 1848—one result being the great Oregon Trail epic *The Covered Wagon* (1923). Similarly charming is a first-hand account of the Victorian formality that characterized Lasky's dealings with his partner Adolph Zukor; for 40 years, through good times and bad, they addressed each other only as "Mr Zukor" and "Mr. Lasky": it is a window into another age. And there is also the startling first-hand account of the demonically energetic William Fox (of 20th Century-Fox): with his handlebar moustache and withered left arm, he weirdly resembled Kaiser Bill; in his hideous work habits—day and night in a totally shuttered room with no clocks ("he believed in working simply until all the work was done")—he weirdly resembled Hitler and Stalin.

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Film-making is an art, and the great story in *The First Tycoons* is the ability of these men to foresee the artistic possibilities offered in the

new techniques of projecting moving images onto a screen. Even Adolph Zukor, very much a harsh personality, comes across as an enormous cultural benefactor here, because he always pushed for longer, larger, greater pictures: for five-reelers when producers and exhibitors were perfectly satisfied with two-reelers, for ten-reelers when everyone was satisfied with five. (This appeal to greatness is how the romantic Lasky convinced Zukor to finance *The Covered Wagon:* precisely because it would be a movie on a heretofore unimagined scale.)

But, as MacCann emphasizes in his excellent and insightful introduction, film-making is also—and equally—a business. It wasn't only the possibilities the new medium offered for great popular entertainment that enthralled the first entrepreneurs—it was also the possibilities for enormous profits. Albert Smith's Vitagraph Company began in 1896 with an initial capital of $900 and two projection machines in a storefront; by 1916 it was earning Smith and his partners a million dollars a year (Vitagraph eventually was transformed into Warner Brothers when Smith sold out in 1925). Indeed, it is because hard business is the bedrock upon which all movie artistry is actually based that MacCann chose to present the business side of early film-making as the first of the five books in the *First Thirty Years* series.

Yet business history is particularly resistant to the format MacCann has chosen for the series: the short, vivid, eye-witness anecdote. This is because the business dealings of large corporations are inevitably subtle and complex, and the companies that evolved into "The Big Five" became very large very quickly (for they were well-managed, while offering the general populace a totally new service). The financial maneuvers of people like Zukor and Fox, Laemmle and Loew, or the shrewd Mary Pickford (moving spirit behind United Artists), simply cannot be fully understood by means of the short anecdote. The doings of large corporations require careful and detailed elucidation, and they require (above all) continuity of narrative: otherwise, one risks incoherence, and confusion in the reader. That is what happens as *The First Tycoons* progresses.

At first, things are relatively easy to follow by means of anecdotes: Edison and "his" invention, the successful struggles of the independent producers and distributors against Edison's monopoly General Film Co.-Motion Picture Patents Co., the importance for producers of owning theaters, the financial relationship between big films costing big rentals and big luxury film palaces that could afford the rentals. Some of the material MacCann has collected here is just wonderful: for instance, the excited newspaper account of the opening night of the massive Strand movie theater in New York in 1914, which reads like the discovery of a new world, which in a sense it was. But the narrative of the creation of "The Big Five" seems to fall apart as we move into the late 'teens. The specific reasons why some companies survived and others did not are never clear, any more than are the reasons why Hollywood became the center of the industry (that is, why—*exactly*—should the other companies have followed Famous Players-Lasky in establishing separate production units out in Los Angeles, when for 15 years everyone had been satisfied to be based in New York?). The motivation behind Zukor's attempt to establish a sort of monopoly in the 1920s is not well explained, especially in view of his personal experience of Edison's defeat in such an effort a decade before (for that matter, the fierceness of the resistance of Zukor and others to Edison—Carl Laemmle had to deal with almost 300 lawsuits launched against him by Edison's companies—is not well-explained either). And crucially, the reader is left in the dark as to why the ownership of movie theaters by the production companies themselves, which brought in seemingly guaranteed profits into the mid-twenties, should have become a serious financial drag later on. In addition, because the story is told only in small pieces, it is sometimes hard to keep track of who is who, and which studio had done what (both artistically and financially); and major figures tend to pop up suddenly after being absent for 60 pages at a time. (The problem here is exacerbated by the failure to provide an index.) MacCann shows in his introduction to the book just how capable he is of providing the reader with an illuminating continuous narrative. It is a shame that his introductions to each major section of the book (and to each anecdote), excellent in themselves, are not longer and more detailed; in that way the financial story—and as MacCann emphasizes, it is a crucial story—could have been laid out with more coherence.

Some professional historians of film may

also be a bit disturbed by MacCann's sheer emphasis on individuals and individual decision-making. It seems old-fashioned. In film history, as in the profession in general, there has developed since the 1960s a vogue for history-without-narrative, history-without-great-figures, history, indeed, as the analysis of the language of historical representation itself. Especially influential here has been French structuralism and deconstructionism, where the emblematic figure is Michel Foucault. MacCann certainly ignores this aspect of the New Film History and its underlying philosophies, and one doubts that he has thought about it much in relation to this book. But as Lawrence Stone has come to emphasize, the fact is that French structuralism has produced not a single major work of history, except for Foucault's efforts themselves (which might better be classified anyway not as history but as moral philosophy with examples drawn from history); and it has been especially weak in accounting for historical *change*. So in recent years there has been something of a return in professional circles to a belief in the importance of the will of the inidvidual as a crucial causal agent. And, as Stone says, the return of the individual forces historians back into the narrative, story-telling mode "whether they like it or not": that is a natural consequence of the subject once more being the human person, not circumstances, society, or language. In his old-fashioned emphasis on the individual, MacCann is therefore modern; and it is no accident that one strength of *The First Tycoons* lies in its ability to account plausibly for change (until one reaches the 1920s, at any rate).

Whatever problems exist in the latter part of the book, however, this anecdotal anthology nevertheless works splendidly as a basic source book for students, and it also has the great virtue of liveliness. The problem with the format will probably not be so pressing in the later volumes of the series, since the subject matter will be somewhat different. And even with the difficulties in the format, this book is well worth a look, both for film teachers and for the general public as well. For even as it is, *The First Tycoons* provides great insight into what used to be called "the romance of business," and how the personal efforts and risks undertaken by individual entrepreneurs have helped transform American culture.

—ARTHUR M. ECKSTEIN

THE COLUMBIA SHORTS: Two-Reel Hollywood Film Comedies, 1933-1958. By Ted Okuda with Edward Watz. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987.

MOVIE COMEDIANS: The Complete Guide. By James L. Neibaur. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987.

It is a rare and wonderful event when a work on cinema history combines sound scholarship with fun reading, and *Columbia Comedy Shorts* is such an event. It offers a complete and accurate accounting of each starring series, from the Three Stooges and Harry Langdon to such now obscure entries as The Glove Slingers and The Radio Rogues. Each star series is given a concise history, detailing the strengths and weaknesses of the series and the performer(s). In addition, a filmography follows, giving title, date of release, director, cast, and a brief synopsis. The level of accuracy is outstanding. Biographical information and background on working conditions are equally superb. This volume is a fine example of what film scholarship on a popular subject should be. We can only hope that similar books on the comedy short departments of Paramount and RKO are in the works.

Film scholarship is just what is needed, in massive doses, to salvage *Movie Comedians.* Purporting to be "The Complete Guide," the book is an unqualified disaster, filled to overflowing with factual errors, uninformed opinions, and poor writing. We know we're in trouble when "The Complete Guide" fails to list Jacques Tati's appearance in *Bed and Board,* and features a slipshod appendix of secondary comics with virtually no information except their lifespans. While any such book is subject to the personal prejudices of the author, a terse dismissal of Max Linder, a vindictive trashing of the entire Our Gang series, the ignoring of any black comic before Richard Pryor, and a ludicrous five-star rating system that puts *Limelight* on a par with *A King in New York* goes far beyond acceptable idiosyncracies. Even worse are the inaccurate dates and misspelled names. Poorly phrased sentences lead one to a host of wrong conclusions, such as the inference that Martin and Lewis had casting rights for their films. The volume fails as a reliable reference, as a historical overview, as a rating guide, and as a nostalgia inducement. We can only hope that interested parties will not happen onto this reprehensible work until they

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have learned enough to know better.

—BEN URISH

HISTORY ON/AND/IN FILM

Edited by Tom O'Regan and Brian Shoesmith. History and Film Association of Australia, 1987.

This selection of papers presented during the Third History and Film Conference at Perth, Australia, in 1985 is heavily weighted in favor of film study. Slashed title notwithstanding, most of the 20 offerings (one is an interview) might comfortably regroup themselves under other headings or none at all—say, at proceedings of an SCS meeting or a film section of the MLA.

Such observations intend in no way to criticize this book, much of which is excellent, but to underline the present, gingerly state of film-history collaboration. While O'Regan's introduction proposes "The move in film studies must be rather towards specifying film's (and TV's) relation to the wider issue of the specular and auditory organization of public life," what follows quite orthodoxly considers feature films, film and television documentaries, and music video clips.

A kind of preface to the volume includes three papers dealing with the circumstances of Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now* report on Senator McCarthy; the political and esthetic ideology of John Grierson; and an ideological analysis of an Eddie Cantor-Busby Berkeley production number, "Keep Young and Beautiful" in *Roman Scandals.* Subsequent sections consider (1) four aspects of film history (European response to American sound film, editing practices in French cinema, studio dominance in thirties India, sound transition in Japan); (2) aspects of Australian film history; (3) Nazism as confronted in contemporary German film; and (4) a kind of catchall grouping. "The Historian as Film Producer" uses an author's documentary, *The Parching Winds of Somalia* in example. MTV offerings are compared to vintage Hollywood production numbers. The Straub/Huillet *Fortini-Cani* is argued in terms of thirties Marxist rather than Brechtian preoccupations. In a final section, Brian Shoesmith interviews John O'Connor, editor of the American journal *Film and History.* Finally, an Australian instructor describes his film and video course for first year history students.

Editor Shoesmith considers O'Connor's approaches somewhat conservative, but perhaps caution is sagacious in so layered an interdisciplinary endeavor. Running permutations on *History on/and/in Film* would result at the least in (1) film as an historical document; (2) film as an historical representation; (3) film as an historical problem; (4) history as a filmic problem; (5) film history; (6) the public reception to film as cultural, social, and/or political history. Substituting TV for film adds a like number of alternatives, plus one more knotty, multi-faceted problem: the historical and consequential relations between film and TV. Then there's the matter of distinguishing between broadcast television and the several other forms of video. It's a puzzlement. —JOHN FELL

Barr, Charles, ed. *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987. $19.95 paper. Historial anthologies are often circumscribed by their editors' access to pertinent material. For this overview of Britain's 90 movie years, jointly sponsored by MOMA and the BFI, Charles Barr was obviously able to commission his contents; the results speak heavily in favor both of Barr's choice of essayists and of their foci. *All Our Yesterdays* is designed in five sections, tracing film's connections to a series of modes and social histories: other media (theater, literature, the music hall, and broadcasting), the government (a source of subsidy and control), politics, morality and esthetics (realism, melodrama, fantasy), genres and subgenres (independent film, animation, regional film, the underworld "spiv"). Finally, there are a series of case studies. What results falls on a continuum of mild to acute revisionism. Poised against Britain's customary repute for respectful and respectable middle-class drama are many films and performers less known to foreign audiences, along with more familiar Hammer Films and Ealing products. *Peeping Tom, Dead of Night,* and early Hitchcock make up a kind of running motif: the most surfaced examples of a dark counterforce to the postures of restrained gentility. Grierson's esthetic is described as a political strategy that touted institutional benevolence at the expense of class interest. Humphrey Jenning's early affiliations with Surrealism and Mass Observation are emphasized. The Worker's Film Movement of the 1930s is described as a harbinger of future television writers and of the sixties London Film-makers Cooperative. No anthology is consistently strong, but *All Our Yesterdays* scores remarkably well. —JOHN FELL

Bren, Frank. *World Cinema 1: Poland.* London: Flicks Books, 1986. £11.95. The first of a new series of books on national cinemas (see Brian McIlroy listing below), this is a sort of grab-bag of semi-organized but fascinating information: on the Yiddish cinema in Poland (from which no films survive),

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Barr, Charles, ed. *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987. $19.95 paper. Historial anthologies are often circumscribed by their editors' access to pertinent material. For this overview of Britain's 90 movie years, jointly sponsored by MOMA and the BFI, Charles Barr was obviously able to commission his contents; the results speak heavily in favor both of Barr's choice of essayists and of their foci. *All Our Yesterdays* is designed in five sections, tracing film's connections to a series of modes and social histories: other media (theater, literature, the music hall, and broadcasting), the government (a source of subsidy and control), politics, morality and esthetics (realism, melodrama, fantasy), genres and subgenres (independent film, animation, regional film, the underworld "spiv"). Finally, there are a series of case studies. What results falls on a continuum of mild to acute revisionism. Poised against Britain's customary repute for respectful and respectable middle-class drama are many films and performers less known to foreign audiences, along with more familiar Hammer Films and Ealing products. *Peeping Tom, Dead of Night,* and early Hitchcock make up a kind of running motif: the most surfaced examples of a dark counterforce to the postures of restrained gentility. Grierson's esthetic is described as a political strategy that touted institutional benevolence at the expense of class interest. Humphrey Jenning's early affiliations with Surrealism and Mass Observation are emphasized. The Worker's Film Movement of the 1930s is described as a harbinger of future television writers and of the sixties London Film-makers Cooperative. No anthology is consistently strong, but *All Our Yesterdays* scores remarkably well. —JOHN FELL

Bren, Frank. *World Cinema 1: Poland.* London: Flicks Books, 1986. £11.95. The first of a new series of books on national cinemas (see Brian McIlroy listing below), this is a sort of grab-bag of semi-organized but fascinating information: on the Yiddish cinema in Poland (from which no films survive),

have learned enough to know better.

—BEN URISH

HISTORY ON/AND/IN FILM

Edited by Tom O'Regan and Brian Shoesmith. History and Film Association of Australia, 1987.

This selection of papers presented during the Third History and Film Conference at Perth, Australia, in 1985 is heavily weighted in favor of film study. Slashed title notwithstanding, most of the 20 offerings (one is an interview) might comfortably regroup themselves under other headings or none at all—say, at proceedings of an SCS meeting or a film section of the MLA.

Such observations intend in no way to criticize this book, much of which is excellent, but to underline the present, gingerly state of film-history collaboration. While O'Regan's introduction proposes "The move in film studies must be rather towards specifying film's (and TV's) relation to the wider issue of the specular and auditory organization of public life," what follows quite orthodoxly considers feature films, film and television documentaries, and music video clips.

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on many film-makers unknown in the West, on the organization of the Polish film schools (yes, there are two). It also features many interview snippets, two full interviews (Wajda, Zanussi), a chronology and bibliography, and quite a lot of stills. Slapdash in organization, but useful in the absence of a real history of Polish film. —E. C.

Butler, Ivan. *Silent Magic: Rediscovering the Silent Film Era.* New York: Continuum, 1988. $24.00. As Kevin Brownlow points out in his foreword, this is an unusual sort of film history—written mainly from memory, by someone who lived through the silent era. Butler evokes many films well, in a fragmentary way, and there are many sumptuous illustrations, but the descriptions of films are of necessity very brief and best in recounting melodramatic effects. Since a lot of the films Butler saw are no longer extant, however, historians and silent buffs will find some new information here. —E. C.

Graham, Cooper C. *Leni Riefenstahl and* Olympia. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986. $32.50. The background, financing, and production history of the film, including the history of its reception, translations of production documents, and a detailed bibliography. E. D.

Gifford Denis. *British Animated Films, 1895-1985: A Filmography.* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., Inc., 1987. $29.95. Ca. 100-word annotations.

Halliwell, Leslie. *Double Take and Fade Away.* London: Grafton Books, 1987. £14.95. An attempt to track 50 years of film comedy on both sides of the Atlantic, this fast-paced volume covers too much ground, with Halliwell telling a little about a lot of the movies' funniest personalities. Still, his coverage of lesser-known British comedians, like George Formby, is informative and the dialogue excerpts are priceless. —RICHARD B. ARMSTRONG

Johnson, Randal, and Robert Stam, ed. *Brazilian Cinema.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988. $12.95 paperback. Paperback of the 1982 volume.

Jones, Stephen G. *The British Labour Movement and Film, 1918-1939.* New York: Methuen, 1988. $69.50. Labour took film seriously in the twenties and thirties, as an instrument of working-class culture and entertainment, as well as education and propaganda.

McIlroy, Brian. *World Cinema 2: Sweden.* London: Flicks Books, 1986. £11.95. A succinct history of Swedish film since the beginnings, arranged by directors in a chronological sequence, with sections on individual films. There are no notes, so it's hard to tell where the historical background information comes from, but the critical treatments of films are generally sensible. —E. C.

Miles, Peter, and Malcolm Smith. *Cinema, Literature and Society.* New York: Croom Helm in association with Methuen, 1988. $35.00. How cinema and literature helped to establish a British national cultural identity in the period between the two World Wars. —E. D.

Mottram, Ron. *The Danish Cinema Before Dreyer.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1988. $29.50. This is a carefully documented history of the Danish industry (which means mostly Nordisk) from 1896 through 1988. Mottram doesn't seem to have come across Bebe Bergsten's *The Great Dane and the Great Northern Film Company* but he has been assiduous in researching a wide variety of books and trade publication sources, and quite a number of the films survive, thanks to the energetic Danish Film Museum. —E. C.

Pratley, Gerald. *Torn Sprockets: The Uncertain Projection of the Canadian Film.* Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1987. $45.00 Pratley is a very well known Canadian film critic, and director of the Ontario Film Institute. This is a survey of the problems and achievements of Canadian film—which are both much more considerable than people on this side of the border realize. The coverage is basically chronological and runs up through 1984 (the latter part of the book becomes a sort of filmography from 1945 through 1984). Pratley is a staunch defender of Canadian cinema (including the Québecois portion of it) and minces no words about Canadians who have sold it out on occasion. He also carries forward sympathetically the increasingly perilous story of the National Film Board. A basic text resource. —E. C.

Rockett, Kevin et al. *Cinema and Ireland.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988. $33.00. The towering presence of Ireland in literature is nowhere near matched in film, but Rockett still finds a lot to say about Ireland as a complex ground for film drama—most of it from non-Irish film-makers. This book is more critical and analytical than Slide's history (q.v.). —E. C.

Shull, Michael S., and David E. Wilt. *Doing Their Bit: Wartime American Animated Short Films, 1939-1945.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1986. $29.95. Two thirds of the volume is a filmography (with ample story-line detail) of the cartoons, prefaced by a matter-of-fact introductory section. —E. C.

Slide, Anthony. *The Big V: A History of the Vitagraph Company.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987. Profiting from Charles Musser's detailed research on Vitagraph's first five years, Slide has revised his own material and broadly expanded its scope in this new edition. Much remaining business history is synopsized and anecdotal, but *The Big V* profits from extended coverage of later, major productions including the martial *Battle Cry for Peace* (1916), now lost. A Vitagraph Who's Who includes 66 short biographies, and the company's productions from 1898 to 1926 are chronologically listed—necessarily incompletely in early years both because all films weren't copyright, and because Blackton and Smith made others for Edison. A basic Vitagraph research file now needs Slide's revision, Albert Smith's *Two Reels and a Crank,* and Musser's long essay, which is slightly more accurate in *Film Before Griffith* than in Slide's citation. Finally, Jon Gartenberg, "Vitagraph Before Griffith: Forging Ahead in the Nickelodeon Era" (*Studies in Visual Communication,*

Fall 1984) picks up where Musser stops.
—JOHN FELL

Slide, Anthony. *The Cinema and Ireland.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, $19.95. Slide has been working on this historical account for two decades, and gives a fuller account of film-making than does Rockett (q.v.). Ireland is the only European country aside from Albania without a film archive, and one is in the formative stages. Several recent Irish features also suggest new creative energy. —E. C.

Sterling, Anna Kate, ed. *The Best of* Shadowland. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987. $22.50. Somewhat in the *Playboy* pattern, the 1920s magazine *Shadowland* combined risque pictures with intelligent articles by writers with reputations—regulars among them including Frank Harris and Kenneth Macgowan. —E. C.

Swann, Paul. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. $29.95. A sort of case study in the general pattern traced by Kristin Thompson in *Exporting Entertainment;* carefully researched. —E. C.

Woll, Allen L., and Randall M. Miller. *Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television: Historical Essays and Bibliography.* New York: Garland, 1987. The chapters on black and Italian characters are especially full and thought-provoking, while those on other groups (including Arabs and Germans, and rather surprisingly, Jews) are cursory, running to large numbers of titles briefly mentioned. The bibliographical sections will be excellent tools for further research into the long and miserable history of racist imagery on American screens. —E. C.

Reference

THE COMPLETE FILM DICTIONARY

By Ira Konigsberg. New York: New American Library, 1987. $24.95.

This *Dictionary* typifies the popular but flawed reference works that dot the 1980s with error and misconception. From the ambiguous metaphor of the preface ("A writer of a dictionary for any subject must be aware of predecessors who earlier mined the field") to a flatly erroneous definition of "zoom" ("The actual movement of a camera either toward or away from a subject") Konigsberg has peppered his 420 pages with an incredible pastiche of error, imprecision, and the fatal flaw of attempting to be all things to all people: "*The Complete Film Dictionary* is intended for those involved in the making of motion pictures, for the student of film, and for the individual who finds pleasure in casually examining literature on the art of the cinema." (Preface, v)

If the author truly had "made a careful and thorough investigation of all the available books on film," (Preface, vi) he would have recognized that, indeed, error lurks everywhere in the minefields of reference. For instance, Konigsberg has plenty of company in the schoolroom corner when he defines "zoom" as a camera movement despite the fact that it is a lens movement. Further exacerbating his error, he continues: "We can find numerous instances of rapid movement of the camera on wheeled supports where the zoom effect has been achieved" (418–19). "Movement of the camera on wheeled supports" is of course a dolly shot, which differs in its visual effect from a zoom, a distinction buried a few paragraphs later in "zoom shot" but totally ignored in nearly a page (89–90) of "dolly" definitions.

Substandard scholarship is most apparent in *The Complete Film Dictionary's* factual errors. Ektachrome (101) is not exclusively a 16mm film and sometimes it *is* viewed directly. Marey's camera exposed twelve shots per second on a glass disk but did not revolve "twelve times per second" (48, 317). The Motion Picture Patents Company was formed in September of 1908 and began operations in January of 1909. It was not "formed in January 1908" (219) nor "in 1909" (98, 157, 168, 311, 323). Typographical errors compound errors of fact: the Zoetrope (1834) was not invented in 1934 (418), Vitagraph did not purchase anything or anybody in 1971 (199) and First National was not formed in 1971 (127). While there is some question as to when the kinetograph was invented, either it was 1889 (180, 331) or 1891 (115) or some other date, but not all of the above. Sam Warner did not purchase the Vitaphone system in 1926 (331); panchromatic film was in use by 1922–23 and not "introduced in 1926" (29); and, *avant garde* is translated as "advanced guard" or "vanguard," not "advanced group" (22).

This *Dictionary* claims to be the first to offer definitions in five categories: "practical terminology," "technical terminology," "the language of business, production and the box office," "historical terms" and "the language of criticism and theory." Even if one accepts those problematical categories, it is hard to conceive that a single volume could contain all the requisite terms for makers, viewers, and students of motion pictures. Witness *The Focal Encyclopedia,* presided over by the precise-minded and production-wise Raymond Spottiswoode, whose

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The pattern of selecting (or rejecting) subjects is also unbalanced. Why include "UFA" (390) and "Pinewood Studios" (262) but not Toho or Cinecittà? Why discuss some periodicals but not *Screen*? Why *Films in Review* (123–24) and *Film Reader* (123) but not *Film Reviews, Film Review Annual,* or *Film Review Digest*? Why list most critical theories but not deconstruction or deconstructive analysis? The preface does not explain the apparent decision to describe companies but not individuals. That "works" with Eastman, Edison, and Pathé Frères whose entries note the personalities who were also corporate principals. With Dickson, Marey, Muybridge, and Porter, however, no such corporate/individual relationship exists and their omission as well as that of Méliès Star-Film, Gaumont and the Lumières is indefensible.

The Complete Film Dictionary's structure is as flawed as its selection process and impossible mission. Repetitious listings and cross-references are overwhelming. Fifteen "zoom" entries with redundant passages for "zoom in" and "zoom out" are cumbersome. The problem is underscored by the reference to a non-existent "crush" entry—perhaps "crash zoom" (67) was intended—and by 30 entries for the term "camera" and its derivatives (38–41) plus 70 for "film" (115–126), 24 of which are empty cross-references, e.g., "film treatment. See *treatment*" (126). Yet in a paradoxical display "*auteur, auteur theory, auteur* criticism" (21) heads one entry. While we're ragging on this issue, consistency is listing acronyms is helpful. If "CID" and "CSI" are used as entry headings then "ADR. *See automatic dialogue replacement*" (7) should not be a cross-reference.

The *Dictionary*'s emphasis on literary, critical and theatrical terms (15% of the 3,500 entries) and its short essays on film genres are creditable but, again, unbalanced. A trendy bias towards recent semiotics shortchanges many. Why, for example, "allegory" (9) and "archetype" (17) but not "analogy"? Are not "simile," "hyperbole," "innuendo" and "understatement" as significant as "irony" (175), "metonomy" (209), "metaphor" (208–09), "signifier" (323) and "synechdoche" [sic] (368)? Further, this *Dictionary* attempts to define major genres and critical schools in brief, encyclopedic entries which most likely will stimulate partisan controversy. Given the shifting fashions of critical terminology, it might prove useful to note periods of ascendency for major movements and critical usage.

Whatever valid information reposes in *The Complete Film Dictionary* does so in a tarnished matrix of error. Sadly, this volume continues the tradition of inaccuracy and imprecision which has long bedeviled film reference works.

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Eight years in the making, over 1,250 pages long, the first volume of *World Film Directors* is, in effect, a thesaurus of 199 director-book digests. Numbers are important here. This handsome encyclopedia is strong on size and scope. It attempts not only to summarize the careers of a slew of directors active before 1945, but to deal, individually if briefly, with the major and semi-major films of each of the 199. (A comparable enterprise, *American Film Directors* [1974], covers 65 film-makers in under 600 pages and deals strictly with excerpted material, primarily on individual films. Similarly, *Contemporary Literary Criticism,* Volume 16 [1981], covers 39 film-makers in about 600 pages.) This whirlwind-tour-of-international-cinema approach is most successful with John Ford (entry written by Andrew Tudor, one of 47 contributors), Welles and Dreyer (both entries by Philip Kemp, the workhorse of the project, with some twenty entries altogether), Buñuel (Miriam Rosen), and Griffith (Gerald Mast). Each of the foregoing, densely detailed signed entries (over a third are signed) gives one a sense of the artist's evolution and the texture of his work. If the contributors offer few brand-new insights, they deftly synthesize and distill old ones. Some of the other contributions, signed and unsigned, reduce to strings of synopses, capsule judgments, and quotes, and tend to evaporate rather quickly, leaving only a filmographic residue.

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But if the writing here is more "balanced" and less idiosyncratically readable than, say, David Thomson's, in *A Biographical Dictionary of Film,* the Wakeman-edited book features much more bibliographic detail. Welles rates about a column and a half of citations; Renoir almost two columns, and Hitchcock two-plus—one regrets only that titles of articles cited could not be included. One of the book's highlights is a meticulously constructed Méliès filmography. Oddly, *Biquefarre* (1983) is omitted from Georges Rouquier's filmography, as is the original US release title (*Mexican Bus Ride*) of Buñuel's *Subida al Cielo* (1953). And since the writing of the Hawks entry, another Fox-Hawks silent, *Paid To Love* (1927), has resurfaced. . . . *World Film Directors* will send you on to other books (and magazines) and may, at the same time, send you fondly back to the films themselves.
—DON WILLIS

Blades, Joe, and The Editors of Consumer Reports Books. *Guide to Movies on Video-Cassette.* Mount Vernon, New York: Consumers Union, 1986. $15.00 paper. Oddly, considering its origins, this volume offers almost nothing in the way of evaluative comments, but its synopses are fuller than Maltin's (100–125 words). Covers about 1000 films that *Consumer Reports* readers liked. —E. C.

Brand, Glen. *Milan Kundera: An Annotated Bibliography.* New York: Garland Publishing, 1988. A bibliography of the work of the Czech novelist including his screenplays and secondary studies of his writing. —E. D.

CMT Movie Database Program. Consolidated Micro Technology, 9400 Hall Road, Downey, CA 90241, 1987. $19.95. A program for computers (IBM PC/XT/AT or compatible using MS-DOS or PC-DOS); it essentially gives you a list of 2,016 almost entirely American movies, with each getting two star names (no directors) and ratings. You can add your own comments, so it could serve as a kind of always-alphabetized notebook. Carries the idea of the non-book from print to electronic format. —E. C.

Finler, Joel. W. *The Hollywood Story: Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the American Movie Business but Didn't Know Where to Look.* New York: Crown, 1988. $35.00. The author of *Stroheim* has produced an ingeniously illustrated 9" x 12" volume which is a kind of atlas of the film industry. Finler provides a techno-economic survey to orient the reader, and then gets into the directors, stars, and "creative personnel," studio by studio. There are charts, mnemonic diagrams, and stills galore—many in color. The text compresses an enormous amount of information into compact form. —E. C.

Fisher, Kim N. *On the Screen: A Film, Television, and Video Research Guide.* Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1987. $35.00 Extremely useful information about information: annotated listings of every type of compilation volume known to the field, plus periodicals, archives, societies, etc.—180 pages worth. Fisher shies a little at projects such as guides to "adult" films, or "liberal" periodicals like *Jump Cut,* but he is comprehensive, succinct, and on the whole reasonably accurate—although (sob!) he got the address of *Film Quarterly* wrong (it's 2120 Berkeley Way, not 2121). —E. C.

Hanson, Patricia King, and Stephen L. Hanson. *Film Review Index. Vol. 2: 1950–1985.* Phoenix, Arizona: The Oryx Press, 1987. $67.50 in North America ($81.00 elsewhere); $127.00 for two-volume set. Aimed at libraries which cannot afford the more massive review-retrieval volumes, this handy set offers quite comprehensive coverage of both reviews and article references, drawn from a very wide range of publications, including the trade papers. With cross indexes to director, year and country of production, and a bibliography of works consulted.
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porary titles. Milne, Willemen, and company have even tracked down original-language titles of many films heretofore known here only by their English-language advertising titles—e.g., *The Imp* (1981, Hong Kong), or *Xiong Bang*. Coverage of earlier decades and other countries is less groundbreaking, or earthshaking, but comprehensive. It seems, however, the fate of every film reference book to promulgate new misinformation even as it corrects old misinformation. *El Jinete sin Cabeza* (Mexico, 1956), for an instance of the latter tendency, is (according to Milne) not a feature, but a serial released as three features. Good. Not so good: "All prints of [*Blood of the Vampire*] appear to have been destroyed." (The film is shown fairly regularly on US television.) One of the authors gets the plot of *Three Cases of Murder* (England, 1954) wrong—only Orson Welles has the dream power. The same set of credits accidentally turns up on two consecutive entries on pages 230 and 231. And it's doubtful that the contributor of the entry on *Night of the Ghouls* (US, 1959) actually saw the movie, as he pretends to have ("Vampira gleefully cavorts"), since recent findings (see *Filmfax* #7, p. 16) indicate that Vampira is not in the film. Misinformation creeps into some titles: *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (p. 147) becomes *The Awful Dr. Orloff;* the 1962 *Cabinet of Caligari* (p. 147) picks up the "Dr." from the original; and *Bracula* (p. 263) becomes *Dracula.* Alternate titles for the entries are plentiful, and all indexed, but are not identified as shooting, re-release, or translated titles. A final note: The authors' auteuristic enthusiasm sometimes gets the better of them. Script and production "deficiencies play to some extent into [Robert] Siodmak's hands," in *Son of Dracula* (US, 1943). *The Ghost Creeps* (US, 1940), with the East Side Kids, is "quite brightly directed by Joseph H. Lewis. . . ." (You have to see the film to appreciate this statement.) And nowhere in the comments on *Nights of the Demon* (England, 1957), a "brilliant adaptation" of an M. R. James story, is the scriptwriter, Charles Bennett, mentioned. It's Jacques Tourneur's baby all the way. —DON WILLIS

Monaco, James. *Who's Who in American Film Now.* New York Zoetrope, 1987. 838 Broadway, NY 10003. $39.95. This is a selection of credit-listings for more than 11,000 creative and technical people active in the film and TV industry today, drawn from the Baseline data base. Introduction offers some intriguing pay figures for various jobs. —E. C.

Nachbar, Jack et al. *Western Films 2: An Annotated Critical Bibliography from 1974 to 1987.* New York, Garland Publishing, 1988. $40.00.

National Video Clearinghouse. *The Video Source Book* (9th ed.). Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1987. $199.00. This astonishing volume lists more than 53,000 video items (including 8mm video and videodisc). The vast majority are educational or practical in nature; this is mainly a reference work for teachers and others seeking informational material—on Apheresis, or Tank Truck Fires, or maybe Root Canal Therapy. However, feature films are also listed (indexed under Drama). And for our readers, the most useful feature may be the index of films available on videodisc (about 1200 titles) because of disc's superior image quality and rapid search features. —E. C.

O'Donnell, Monica M., ed. *Contemporary Theatre, Film & Television: A Continuation of Who's Who in the Theatre. Vol. 4.* Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co., 1987. $98.00. Contains 700 biographical sketches, with credits.

Parish, James Robert and Michael R. Pitts. *The Great Spy Pictures II.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986. $39.50. In part two, Parish and Pitts bring their 1974 volume up to date and conscientiously fill in gaps in the original. Still among the missing, oddly: the far-from-obscure Danny Kaye spy-comedy *Knock on Wood* (1954). Many other older titles omitted the first time around, however, are now in the fold, including *Conspiracy* (1939), *First Comes Courage* (1943), *Journey into Fear* (1942), and *Mademoiselle Docteur* (1936 and 1937). Another oddity: The entry on the latter two movies makes no mention of the original version of the *Fraulein Doktor* story, *Stamboul Quest* (1934), though that film is listed in volume one, and mention is made *there* of *Mademoiselle Docteur* (1937)! Otherwise, the books are well-coordinated. —DON WILLIS

Park, James. *The Film Yearbook. Vol. 6.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. $15.95. Gossip, synopses, lots of pix.

Perry, Ted and Rene Prieto. *Michelangelo Antonioni: A Guide to References and Resources.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986. With a survey of Antonioni's life and an astute essay on his films.

Slater, Thomas J. *Milos Forman: A Bio-Bibliography.* Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1987. $35.95. An overview of the director's life and film career with comprehensive annotated filmography and bibliography of writings on his films. —E. D.

Steene, Birgitta. *Ingmar Bergman: A Guide to References and Resources.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987. $50.00. An established Bergman scholar, Steene has edited her coverage down from 4,000 items, and preceded it with a biographical essay focusing on his childhood, plus a critical essay analyzing the films from a psychobiographical standpoint.

Tee, Dick, ed. *The White Book: The International Production Directory to the Entertainment, Leisure, Record, Concert, Film, Video, Conference, and Exhibition Industries.* 5th ed. London: Birdhurst Ltd., 1988. £25 paperback.

Vinson, James, ed. *Writers and Production Artists.* Vol. IV of the International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers. Chicago: St. James Press, 1987. $60.00. (Vol. V contains indexes; price of set, $250.00.) Prepared by well-informed writers, the biographical notes in this volume mostly run about 500 words each, though some on prolific or otherwise intriguing people run to three times that (de Rougement, Geor-

ges Perinal, Frank Planer). Their inevitable incompleteness is not always due to brevity (e.g., although Ring Lardner's blacklisted period is acknowledged, the item on the Epstein brothers doesn't even mention the Hollywood red hunt); but on the whole they provide accurate and sensible accounts of their subjects' careers. Also included are lists of films worked on, and bibliographies (generally brief) of books and articles by and about each individual. The entries cover writers, producers, art directors, cinematographers, costume designers, composers and other musical staff, editors, choreographers, stuntmen, second-unit directors, special effects and sound technicians, make-up artists, and animators; international scope is excellent, thanks to the participation of archivists and historians from many areas of the world. Unlike *The Motion Picture Guide,* these volumes incorporate professional expertise, and can be purchased with confidence by libraries or individuals.
—ERNEST CALLENBACH

Weiss, Marion. *Martin Scorsese: A Guide to References and Resources.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987. $35.00. With a sketch of Scorsese's movie-crazed life, and summaries of his films' stories and themes.

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Wolfe, Charles. *Frank Capra: A Guide to References and Resources.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987. $50.00 Wolfe's biographical and critical essays trace interesting ambiguities in Capra's image and films, not much noticed at the time but increasingly focused on by later criticism. —E. C.

Wulff, Hans Jurgen. *Bibliography of Film Bibliographies.* New York: Saur, 1987. $54.00.

Zucker, Harvey Marc and Lawrence J. Babich. *Sports Films: A Complete Reference.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987. $39.95. Brief credits and synopses for 2,000 films having something to do with sports; also sections on athletes, and indexes. (Yes, Ronald Reagan has a long index entry, but Jack Oakie's is longer.) —E. C.

Scripts

THE BIG BRASS RING

By Orson Welles with Oja Kodar; afterword by Jonathan Rosenbaum and preface by James Pepper. Santa Teresa Press, P. O. Box 2711, Santa Barbara, CA 93120, 1987. $25.00.

A screenplay by Orson Welles would absolutely thrill the people who read the many, many scripts that *do* get made into films. This story of love and frustration, power and its mongering, would strike such a reader (a producer, director, agent, actor, and the lowly film students who actually read scripts for studio executives in return for a pittance, yet wield enormous power with a reader's report) as slightly old-fashioned, befitting its title. The Big Brass Ring was the lucky unique ring among the iron ones offered on a merry-go-round, once upon a time, as the riders circled past and snatched at them, barely in reach. The brave soul who stretched out far enough to risk losing balance just might grab the brass ring and swing back to the safe rhythm of the never-neighing nags. Well, the wooden steeds, the prizes, and Orson Welles himself have slipped into myth and/or nostalgia, and what remains is an unmade screenplay about brilliance dulled by conformity for having aspired in the wrong circles for the wrong rewards. The plot synopsis is pure Welles.

Senator Blake Pellarin is a Democrat who has just lost the presidency to Ronald Reagan. He vanishes from his politico companions and wife to seek out his old Harvard mentor, a curmudgeon called Kim Menaker. A tryst is arranged in Madrid, and they rediscover a past that unites them over a woman Pellarin had loved too much and an Italian journalist modeled on Oriana Fallaci. Aboard a yacht scouring the seas for the disappeared Pellarin are a crowd of cronies concerned about national security, political security, and marital security. When Menaker and Pellarin are reunited, we get a glimpse of the importance of great political cauldrons like the Spanish Civil War, the Kennedy era, and the concoctions that come from them. The taste is bitter with disappointment and the story resorts to subplots to compensate for being, in fact, a character study. Unnecessary except to expose the eccentric nature of Pellarin is a plot twist in which he invites his wife's maid to steal an emerald necklace, promising to fence it for her, which, of course, he fails to do. Later, the necklace winds up overboard to reassure us of the futility of wealth. Likewise, a love affair quashed by Menaker in the interest of Pellarin's political future rears its head after all these years, as Pellarin gets to the bottom of why the girl disappeared just when he had expected to abandon everything for her. He goes to meet her near an amusement park, which is exploited for little more than its traditional symbolism. The meat of the matter is in the mentor/politico affair under siege by a certain Buckle, who would like

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to work for the CIA, and apes agency mannerisms to the distress of all parties. But this is a story not of ringing success and resounding failure, but rather of poses, mistakes, and regrets, likely to plague any human being but lethal for people engaged in races and policies bigger than they are.

This is an important tale of the ordinary madness of people in public life and their indecision in personal matters that could and should trip them up. The characters are often sketched at the top of the scene, but that information fails to appear in the dialogue or screen images, so the execution of the screenplay would have required a few more drafts, to be sure. A producer would probably insist upon that before going into production. A director of the caliber of Welles, however, might want to retain the flexibility of the story, until rehearsal, because it is about a man's flight from his political destiny and the price others pay for his success. Welles himself was to play Menaker, and his companion and co-author Oja Kodar was slotted for the journalist intent on getting to the bottom of Pellarin's predicament. To play the lead Warren Beatty, Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman, Jack Nicholson, Robert Redford, and Burt Reynolds were approached (what? not Robert De Niro?), and each of them declined the offer of $2 million and the chance to be directed by Welles. Working as producers on this were Arnon Milchan and Henry Jaglom, who had convinced Welles to write the script, the final draft of which is dated June 22, 1982. "By late 1982," writes Jonathan Rosenbaum in his fascinating afterword, "the project was effectively dead."

An astonishing as this may seem to Welles fans, the operative and ironic word here is "effectively." Within a bottom-line-oriented industry, Welles had become an icon worthy of respect but not to be trusted with a $6 million budget for a story that smacked of an up-dated *Citizen Kane* (which would also be a confusing script, if it were stripped of what we now know of its visual impact). The extraordinary value of this book is to show the acorn from which a mighty oak did not grow—proof that a reputation can kill a project more "effectively" than a promising script and the cowardice of stars.

Rosenbaum's thoughtful and balanced account of how *Brass Ring* evolved and devolved includes the testimony of Oja Kodar and every possible biographical connection, down to the monkey in the story that dies of a urinary disorder, as did one of Welles's pets. Inspirations from the political scene cover the landscape, leaving out only George Bush, another Ivy League Texan aspiring to the presidency too late for Rosenbaum's lip-smacking likenesses. As usual, Rosenbaum's critical analysis employs the entire *oeuvre,* discovering characteristics of Welles that clarify *Brass Ring,* including "the desire to shock . . . as in the seediness and violence of *Touch of Evil.*"

In the dismal world of current politics, *The Big Brass Ring* fails to shock—so far. Possibly, Welles could have twisted it and darkened it and shown us the sordid soul of a man we want to like, surrounded by people even more contemptible. Welles was capable of contempt and could deliver it in an epic style that endowed his characters with the grandeur of souls damned to hell. It once fell to critics and Welles enthusiasts to remind film industry leaders of that particular talent in their midst, when they condescended to him with "life achievement" awards. Rosenbaum deserves credit for having been one of those insistent writers and for now giving us, as he calls it, "the rare privilege of hearing his voice, resonant and unmistakable, still in the present, addressing us directly." As sensitive as we are to Welles's oracular message, we still fear it, for he longed to live in a world where creativity was devoted to searching for that elusive moment of truth in the past. Such risky box-office requires a leap of faith that nobody had in Orson Welles. Let his death not disguise that dirty fact. Hollywood, read this and weep. —KAREN JAEHNE

Affron, Charles, ed. *8-1/2.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987. $28.00 cloth, $12.00 paper. Sympathetic introductory essay, biographical sketch, the continuity script, excerpts from the shooting script that were omitted from film, Fellini's first outline of the story in a letter, interviews, etc.

Bondanella, Peter, and Manuela Gieri, eds. *La Strada: Federico Fellini, Director.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988. $25.00 cloth; $12.00 paper. Script, introduction, biographical sketch, plus assorted essays and reviews.

Carey, Peter, and Ray Lawrence. *Bliss.* Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986. $11.95 paper. Script, plus materials analyzing adaptation from Carey's novel (he is a prominent Australian novelist).

to work for the CIA, and apes agency mannerisms to the distress of all parties. But this is a story not of ringing success and resounding failure, but rather of poses, mistakes, and regrets, likely to plague any human being but lethal for people engaged in races and policies bigger than they are.

This is an important tale of the ordinary madness of people in public life and their indecision in personal matters that could and should trip them up. The characters are often sketched at the top of the scene, but that information fails to appear in the dialogue or screen images, so the execution of the screenplay would have required a few more drafts, to be sure. A producer would probably insist upon that before going into production. A director of the caliber of Welles, however, might want to retain the flexibility of the story, until rehearsal, because it is about a man's flight from his political destiny and the price others pay for his success. Welles himself was to play Menaker, and his companion and co-author Oja Kodar was slotted for the journalist intent on getting to the bottom of Pellarin's predicament. To play the lead Warren Beatty, Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman, Jack Nicholson, Robert Redford, and Burt Reynolds were approached (what? not Robert De Niro?), and each of them declined the offer of $2 million and the chance to be directed by Welles. Working as producers on this were Arnon Milchan and Henry Jaglom, who had convinced Welles to write the script, the final draft of which is dated June 22, 1982. "By late 1982," writes Jonathan Rosenbaum in his fascinating afterword, "the project was effectively dead."

An astonishing as this may seem to Welles fans, the operative and ironic word here is "effectively." Within a bottom-line-oriented industry, Welles had become an icon worthy of respect but not to be trusted with a $6 million budget for a story that smacked of an up-dated *Citizen Kane* (which would also be a confusing script, if it were stripped of what we now know of its visual impact). The extraordinary value of this book is to show the acorn from which a mighty oak did not grow—proof that a reputation can kill a project more "effectively" than a promising script and the cowardice of stars.

Rosenbaum's thoughtful and balanced account of how *Brass Ring* evolved and devolved includes the testimony of Oja Kodar and every possible biographical connection, down to the monkey in the story that dies of a urinary disorder, as did one of Welles's pets. Inspirations from the political scene cover the landscape, leaving out only George Bush, another Ivy League Texan aspiring to the presidency too late for Rosenbaum's lip-smacking likenesses. As usual, Rosenbaum's critical analysis employs the entire *oeuvre,* discovering characteristics of Welles that clarify *Brass Ring,* including "the desire to shock . . . as in the seediness and violence of *Touch of Evil.*"

In the dismal world of current politics, *The Big Brass Ring* fails to shock—so far. Possibly, Welles could have twisted it and darkened it and shown us the sordid soul of a man we want to like, surrounded by people even more contemptible. Welles was capable of contempt and could deliver it in an epic style that endowed his characters with the grandeur of souls damned to hell. It once fell to critics and Welles enthusiasts to remind film industry leaders of that particular talent in their midst, when they condescended to him with "life achievement" awards. Rosenbaum deserves credit for having been one of those insistent writers and for now giving us, as he calls it, "the rare privilege of hearing his voice, resonant and unmistakable, still in the present, addressing us directly." As sensitive as we are to Welles's oracular message, we still fear it, for he longed to live in a world where creativity was devoted to searching for that elusive moment of truth in the past. Such risky box-office requires a leap of faith that nobody had in Orson Welles. Let his death not disguise that dirty fact. Hollywood, read this and weep. —KAREN JAEHNE

Affron, Charles, ed. *8-1/2.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987. $28.00 cloth, $12.00 paper. Sympathetic introductory essay, biographical sketch, the continuity script, excerpts from the shooting script that were omitted from film, Fellini's first outline of the story in a letter, interviews, etc.

Bondanella, Peter, and Manuela Gieri, eds. *La Strada: Federico Fellini, Director.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988. $25.00 cloth; $12.00 paper. Script, introduction, biographical sketch, plus assorted essays and reviews.

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Theory

THE DESIRE TO DESIRE
The Woman's Film of the 1940s

By Mary Anne Doane. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. $35.00 cloth, $12.50 paper.

Feminist film theorists understandably keep returning to the decade of the 1940s; it provides a perspective on current vexations about gender roles, since the films of that period document the gender crisis that occurred during and after World War II, when men's absence from the workplace and the family in the first half of the decade demanded that women assume male roles, and men's return in the second half demanded that women retreat to traditional roles as silent homemakers. E. Ann Kaplan's *Women in Film Noir* (1978) was the first book to focus on Hollywood's ways of both reinforcing patriarchal dominance during the forties, and foregrounding through the film noir genre the anxiety both sexes attached to the concept of woman as a fully active—meaning overly aggressive—subject in a patriarchal culture. Mary Ann Doane's new book demonstrates how insidiously that anxiety about the redefinition of gender roles pervades even the genre of the woman's film in the 1940s.

She notes from the start that the parallel development in this century of psychoanalytic scenarios and cinematic scenarios of masochistic femininity suggests how entrenched is the cultural identification of women with suffering and pain, hysteria and paranoia. Throughout the book she then probes relentlessly the ways in which psychoanalytic theory meshes with popular assumptions and the cinematic apparatus in the forties woman's film to render passive the feminine spectator's desire to identify with—to be—an active, productive female subject. A woman's role is to *desire to desire.* Doane demonstrates not only that female desire is portrayed by Freud, the culture, and Hollywood as passive, impossible, unfulfillable, but more importantly that the very assertion in these particular films of a desiring female as the agent of action is counterbalanced by a complex cinematic and narrative denial of her desire. This is a new feminist perspective. Probably because the book's direction and purpose have developed and changed over the years during which several of its chapters have been published in various journals, and also because it speaks in the tongues of psychoanalytic theory and semiotics, this perspective is not always clear. But a reader's diligence is rewarded by the discovery of Doane's insightful elaboration of the mechanics of the assertion and denial of desire in the four subgenres of the woman's film. This is the book's most valuable contribution.

In the films of medical discourse (principally *Dark Victory,* 1939; *The Cat People,* 1942; *Lady in the Dark,* 1944; *The Locket,* 1964; *Possessed,* 1947; *Johnny Belinda,* 1948; *Beyond the Forest,* 1949), Doane observes that the woman is the purported desiring subject/protagonist in that she is ill, consumed by disease—a trope for desire—but in fact she is the object of the doctor's gaze, her body subject to the rational light his male look and touch shed upon her disease/desire. The doctor-patient relation obviously becomes in these films a "socially acceptable 'norm' of the heterosexual alliance" through which a cure for the female psychic illness of desire is possible; her denial of this doctor-patient relationship often results in her death. In this way, Doane notes, the film of medical discourse is a "didactic exercise" for the female spectator—one which cinematically denies its desiring female subject the assertion of the gaze.

In the maternal melodramas (principally *Stella Dallas,* 1937; *Tender Comrade,* 1943; *Since You Went Away,* 1944; *Mildred Pierce,* 1945; *The Reckless Moment,* 1945; *To Each His Own,* 1946), the female protagonist is the active subject of the narrative, in which separation is the theme. But in these films motherhood signifies the repression of desire; the discourse alleges that the problem with female sexuality is that

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the woman pursues the wrong object, the child; she is guilty of misdirected desire. At the same time her fearful maternal excess is depicted in polarities—smothering over-closeness to the child at one extreme, and anxiety-producing neglect of it at the other, usually when she attends to duties outside the home.

Complicated plot convolutions, failed communication, and the many other obstacles which prevent her reunion with her child all evoke a sense of pathos (its sentimentality heightened by melodramatic music, gesture, *mise-en-scène*) at the hopeless distance between this female protagonist and the object of her desire. The most common obstacle, and the most pathetic, is mistiming, "the rhetoric of the too-late"; the film text seems to insist that all the just-missed moments and too-late recognitions are accidental rather than structural, so that they confirm the *possibility* of an ideal reunion, and thus evoke tears. In contrast to the violence of the narrative in such men's genres as the western and the detective film, Doane concludes persuasively, the emotional violence of maternal melodrama is "displaced onto effect—producing tear*jerkers*. Its sentimentality is, in some respects, quite sadistic." And the sadism springs from the cinematic tactic of simultaneous affirmation and denial of the woman's maternal desire.

In the discourse of the love story (principally *Kitty Foyle,* 1940; *The Letter,* 1940; *Humoresque,* 1946; *Leave Her to Heaven,* 1946; *Daisy Kenyon,* 1947; *Letter from an Unknown Woman,* 1948; *My Foolish Heart,* 1949; *The Heiress,* 1949; *Madame Bovary,* 1949), desire is essentially narcissistic. The mirror, its most common figure, becomes a sign for the Lacanian imaginary's collapsing of subject and object, of fantasy and reality, especially when both the woman and her love object are framed in a single mirror shot. This cinematic collapsing of the shot/reverse shot convention for rendering lovers' glances reasserts Freud's assumption that women's desires are narcissistic, pre-Oedipal, located in the imaginary. When she looks at herself in the mirror, it is not so much an image of herself she responds to as it is "the image of herself held in the gaze of a man"; her status as subject coincides with her status as object. And since the man in the love story is a "feminized man," a man most like what women are assumed to want men to be (like themselves, attentive to intricate readings of facial expression, minute incidents, interpersonal relations), he is an extension of her subject-object status, inviting the oscillating male/female identification which Laura Mulvey attributes to the feminine spectator.

Always excessive, her desire (frequently sentimentalized by a musical motif or song which links the man with her longing) is invariably frustrated, and often defined by the passive activity of waiting and silent suffering, sometimes as witness to the man's active departures and arrivals. Time expands for her, as she waits, while his absent presence is fully represented by the failure of the technologies of communication: boats, trains, telephones, letters exist only to separate the lovers, to promote misunderstanding. When desire involves the female protagonist in a choice between two men, the choice marks the logical, sometimes didactic end of the narrative; often it means her "acceptance of the real man over the fantasized prince," not the fulfillment of desire, or the continuation of an ever-branching narrative in which she is an active, fully privileged subject.

More often her excessive desire leads to the ultimate containment, death, sometimes constructed cinematically as the death of the woman's point of view: crosscuts between heavy lorries and increasing close-ups of the woman's face in *Waterloo Bridge,* for example, end when her eyes fill the frame. The emotionally and physically violent closure of the love story, the repetition, year after year in movie after movie, of the deaths and disappointments of desiring women is as sadistic as the endings of the maternal melodramas; cinematic technology in this subgenre, as in the others, both asserts and denies a woman's active role in the fulfillment of desire.

Finally, the paranoid gothic films (principally *Rebecca,* 1940; *Suspicion,* 1941; *Dark Waters,* 1944; *Gaslight,* 1944; *Jane Eyre,* 1944; *Spellbound,* 1945; *Dragonwyck,* 1946; *The Spiral Staircase,* 1946; *The Two Mrs. Carrolls,* 1947; *The Secret Beyond the Door,* 1948; *Caught,* 1949), infiltrated as they are by *film noir* and the horror film, and obsessed with the aggressive process of looking and being looked at, are not usually classified as woman's films. But Doane argues that they qualify because the woman is the agent of the gaze, because her anxiety occurs in the woman's culturally as-

signed space, the home, and because the feminine spectator, stereotyped by Freud and the culture as hysterical and obsessed with the feeling that she is being watched, can presumably identify with the hysteria and paranoid anxiety of the female subject. Further, the typical trajectory of the narrative is a variation on those in the other woman's films: the female subject's desire (in this subgenre the desire is to know) is disarmed, made passive.

The woman, in the recurring paranoid-gothic scenario, fears that her husband is trying to kill her. Her desire is transformed into fear as she moves through the uncanny, unfamiliar passageways and staircases of the home, and eventually through the locked door to the secret room where she at last confronts what Pascal Bonitzer calls the portended and deferred "screen of the worst"—an appalling portrait or mirror image of some aspect of herself. Thus made aware of her own condition—sometimes perceived by discovering the fate of a previous wife—she fully understands her helplessness. In this scenario, cinema itself attacks the woman. The organization of image and sound becomes the machine of her torment, through such techniques as turning her own voice-over against her, multiplying it so that an array of voices seem to attack her image, or cutting the voice off suddenly, casting her image into a solitary abyss of silence. Doane notes that though these films forcefully ascribe the gaze to her, it is difficult if not impossible to represent the woman as the agent of the gaze. Indeed, unlike the doctor's curative investigating gaze in the films of medical discourse, the woman's investigating gaze in the paranoid gothics is "simultaneous with her own victimization." Once again, the role of an active, desiring female subject is both affirmed and denied through the machinations of the cinematic apparatus.

Doane's often brilliant readings of many specific films refine our perceptions of the cinematic message in 1940s woman's films and heighten our awareness of the continuing use of the same machinery of affirmation and denial in recent films with female protagonists (*The Jagged Edge, Fatal Attraction,* and even *Nuts,* for example). Though one might wish that she had addressed the book to a more general audience, she has made a useful breakthrough in feminist theory. She describes that breakthrough herself as the shift away "from the issue of the positive or negative representations or images of women to the question of the very organization of vision and its effects." Casting a sophisticated eye on "the constitution of vision as a process both within the filmic text (the representation of the woman seeing) and between text and spectator," she draws inferences about the cultural and cinematic construction of gender that invite us to speculate on how it might be altered, particularly by feminist filmmakers. —HELEN T. BUTTEL

UNHEARD MELODIES
Narrative Film Music

By Claudia Gorbman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987. $25.00 cloth, $9.95 paper.

Although film music constitutes a basic element in the apparatus of the classical narrative film, it has yet to be absorbed into the mainstream of writing on cinematic history, theory, and criticism. Thus when Claudia Gorbman, in the introduction to her new book, points out the visual chauvinism inherent in such commonly accepted cinematic terms as point of view (and corrects our short-*sightedness* by relabelling it point of experience), we know this is a text to take notice of.

The history of film-music criticism is almost as old as the art of film itself. As early as 1909, Edison Pictures marketed cue sheets to facilitate live accompaniment to their silent films, and enterprising individuals like Max Winkler were soon to do the same. By 1910, trade publications like *Moving Picture World* featured regular columns on film music, offering cue sheets, advice, and analysis, however meager, of representative scores. These publications were followed by a wealth of manuals, encyclopedias, and other prescriptive texts aimed at the practitioner. In the forties the first wave of critics/theoreticians emerged: Kurt London (*Film Music,* 1936), Sergei Eisenstein ("Form and Content: Practice" in *Film Sense,* 1942), Leonid Sabaneev (*Music for the Films,* 1935), and Hanns Eisler and Theodor Adorno (*Composing for the Films,* 1947). Although the market has never lacked books on film music (the prolific Tony Thomas, Mark Evans, Roy Prendergast, and Irwin Bazelon have all contributed within the last decade or so), its study has lacked a theoretical text in English which situ-

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ates film music within the perspectives which have reshaped the discipline: semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalytic theory. What Claudia Gorbman offers is such a text, which clearly, coherently, and often dazzlingly, situates film music in the treacherous terrain of contemporary theory.

The main question which evolves from these discourses is one which Gorbman poses in the introduction and examines in two following chapters: *"Why music?"* Regarding this question from a number of contemporary theoretical perspectives, Gorbman settles on music's two "overarching roles": the semiotic concept of *anchrage* (based on Roland Barthes's notion of anchoring the instability of visual signification, specifically photography, through the function of the caption) and the psychological concept of suture. The psychoanalytic framework is a particularly fruitful one, bringing to the study of film music a discourse for coming to terms with the relationship of music and pleasure, the cinematic conditions of bonding, and the creation of subjectivity in the spectator.

The strength of Gorbman's text is this theoretical perspective. Two chapters informed by it are the analyses of the classical Hollywood score (and the influence of Max Steiner) and the neo-Marxist critique of that practice in *Composing for the Films* by Eisler and Adorno.[1] The latter may be the best chapter in the book. Here Gorbman analyzes an oft-neglected text[2] which posited a cultural critique decades before film studies would turn its attention in this direction.

For Eisler and Adorno, advanced capitalism articulates material and cultural production, commodifying both product (film) and process (spectatorship). Entertainment is turned into "economic machinery which has always sustained the masses" and the spectator into a social subject. "But at the same time the products that are most widespread, and therefore closest to the public, are objectively more remote from the public, as regards the methods by which they are produced and the interests they represent." The classical (read Hollywood) model masks these contradictions with what Gorbman calls the "pretense to immediacy—textual strategies for involving the spectator, grasping him/her in a hold of imaginary identification—[which] obscures the contradictions inherent in film." For Eisler and Adorno, film music, with its ability to suture the spectator into the fictive reality, is a primary mechanism for the support and promulgation of identificatory effect. What Eisler and Adorno offer is an alternative film-music practice which would expose contradiction and sever the spectator's hypnotic identification with the film.

Composing for the Films is not an unproblematic text, however, and Gorbman wisely points out its weaknesses. Eisler's failure to embody the alternative to the classical model he attacked (he was himself a composer who worked, briefly and unsuccessfully, in Hollywood), has fueled a rather too convenient "sour grapes" scenario, and facilitated his dismissal as a serious critic. While Eisler's inability to put theory into practice certainly does not invalidate his critique, it does reveal serious questions about the nature of film and the apparatus which constructs it that *Composing for the Films* has not fully addressed. To what extent is the apparatus of the classical narrative model so powerful that the operation of a divergent or progressive musical text will have little or no effect? Having heard an Eisler score, it's a question that springs immediately to my mind. Gorbman reminds us that Eisler chose his collaborators carefully—Odets, Renoir, Lang, Sirk—and wonders how he would have scored such a classical narrative as *Mildred Pierce* (a text on which Max Steiner left his indelible stamp). She writes: "An Eisler score, designed to unmask contradictions throughout *Mildred Pierce,* would surely just sound wrong to an audience thoroughly steeped in—and paying for—identification of the kind Adorno and Eisler rail against." In my opinion, such an audience wouldn't even hear a *difference;* the recovery mechanisms in the classical model would overwhelm whatever incongruity (and thus critique) were implicit in the music. Yet Gorbman has uncovered a rich field of investigation in Eisler and Adorno's work, and one which she convincingly argues is central to continued progress in the field. It's time the growing discipline of film music reconsider its neglect of Eisler and Adorno and turn its atten-

1. In English editions of *Composing for the Films,* the title page acknowledges only Eisler. But in the original German, Adorno's name also appears.

2. An exception is Phil Rosen's insightful "Adorno and Film Music: Theoretical Notes on *Composing for the Films,*" *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980), 157-182.

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The remainder of *Unheard Melodies* is composed of analyses, some extended (*Zéro de conduite*), some brief (*Sous les toits de Paris* and *Hangover Square*). Two of them have been published previously and thus do not partake fully of (and sometimes are not entirely consistent with) the rich theoretical apparatus and perspective set up in the opening chapters. The final analysis, *Hangover Square,* is better integrated with the earlier material and, although short and somewhat elliptical (the crucial middle section is set up piecemeal with titles such as "Transgression vs. the Law," "Moods," and "Musical Themes"), is the best of the three. Using French theoretician Michel Chion's systemic for the analysis of sound-track music, Gorbman demonstrates the narratological effects of Herrmann's "anempathetic" score—that is, music which responds to the narrative through indifference to its emotional course. Through her analysis, she exemplifies what criticism does at its best, offering not only an illuminating reading of a specific text but probing insights which exceed its particularity:

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Unheard Melodies is a text on film music which transcends the anecdotal, quasi-historical focus other books on the subject embody. It is a ground-breaking work which provides an access point to the admittedly foreign terrain of film music for the film scholar/critic and establishes the standard for theoretical discourse in the field. —KATHRYN KALINAK

THINKING IN PICTURES
Dramatic Structure in D. W. Griffith's Biograph Films

By Joyce E. Jesionowski. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987. $27.50.

Jesionowski shows for the first time, in rigorous shot-by-shot analyses, what Griffith really did—and allows us to understand its implications for film narrative structure in general. When Griffith began making films, the shot had been recognized as a basic element, the camera had a certain freedom, transitional effects had been explored, audiences wanted stories. It was the unique synthesis of these elements, through structural schemes that Jesionoski traces as they evolved in 165 Biographs, that was truly Griffith's great achievement.

—E. C.

FILM AS LITERATURE, *LITERATURE AS FILM*
An Introduction to and Bibliography of Film's Relationship to Literature

By Harris Ross. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987.

I came upon Ross's book while struggling to write on narration and implied authorship in fiction and the cinema, so I read it with more than a casual reveiwer's eye. By and large, it is a highly useful volume. For the bibliography, Ross's chief competition is Jeffrey Welch's *Literature and Film: An Annotated Bibliography, 1909–1977* (New York: Garland, 1981). Ten years worth of new publications would alone justify another book, but there are even better reasons to be gratified by Ross's work. For one thing, Ross lists more than twice as many titles (2495 to Welch's 1235). Whereas Welch's order of listing is simply chronological, Ross provides a *division raisonée* in 17 chapters: on film's relationship to prose fiction, drama, and poetry; on discussions of film as a (kind of) language; on adaptations and adaptation theory; on the careers of screenwriters; on views about film, analyses of film adaptations, or the cinematic qualities of literary texts by writers in America, the United Kingdom, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa (with separate chapters on Shakespeare and classical Greek and Latin authors). In addition there are lists of published scripts by literary figures or of adaptations of their work, materials on how to teach film and literature, and lists of bibliographies on the subject.

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Even in more problematic areas like "point of view," "voice," and narrative space, Ross intelligently demonstrates the inadequacy of long-held views, like the analogy between the narrator and the "eye" of the camera and the misapplication of personal-pronoun grammar to cinematic narrative structure. (In the course of that discussion, he usefully cites little-known materials, like a 30-year-old article which explains in detail why *The Lady in the Lake* fails as a first-person narrative.) He also showed me the confusion that I myself have contributed to the discussion of narrative space in *Story and Discourse.* Though it is not always clear that he understands the complex theorizing of Kawin, Henderson, Metz, Bordwell, Branigan, and others, even an occasional confusion is a good barometer that theorists need greater consistency or clearer expression if we want to reach the more dedicated and intelligent of our readers.

The essay is well-documented with illustrations from films which seem freshly viewed and accurately described. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of Ross's essay is its refusal to take as given the traditional view that film is innately closer to fiction than to drama. His discussion of time relations in plays like *Death of a Salesman, The Infernal Machine, A Son Came Home,* for example, shows how film/drama relations need to be reconsidered. There are many more things that drama can do than avid film/novel analogists have granted, and much of the writing on the subject is hopelessly outdated.

The only thing I don't understand about Ross's book is why the second half of the title is in italics. —SEYMOUR CHATMAN

Miscellaneous

OUTRAGEOUS CONDUCT
Art, Ego and the *Twilight Zone* Case

By Stephen Farber and Marc Green. New York: Arbor House, 1988.

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Infamously, a real-life catastrophe ensued: a helicopter being used as a flying camera platform was unintentionally blown to earth, crushing and decapitating Morrow and the two children. Once it became known that Landis and some members of his team had hired these children and exposed them to danger in deliberate violation of California's child labor laws, a nearly five-year grind of legal maneuvers, investigations, and indictments, as well as charges and countercharges ranging from reckless endangerment to murder, began. The protracted final act, *The People v. John Landis et al.,* opened on September 3, 1986 ("et al." including Landis's longtime partner, producer George Folsey, Jr.; his production manager, Dan Allingham; veteran special effects supervisor Paul Stewart; and helicopter pilot Dorsey Wingo, a newcomer to movie-making). After nearly eleven months of testimony, often garish public sniping between the prosecutor and the defense team, open warfare between the prosecutor and her predecessor, and a diverse parade of witnesses that embraced both the Hollywood studio elite and the Asian immigrant communities of the Los Angeles basin, the jury, on May 29, 1987, acquitted the defendants on all counts. This is exactly where Hollywood would like the whole obscenity to rest, but if there is any justice, *Outrageous Conduct: Art, Ego and the*

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Infamously, a real-life catastrophe ensued: a helicopter being used as a flying camera platform was unintentionally blown to earth, crushing and decapitating Morrow and the two children. Once it became known that Landis and some members of his team had hired these children and exposed them to danger in deliberate violation of California's child labor laws, a nearly five-year grind of legal maneuvers, investigations, and indictments, as well as charges and countercharges ranging from reckless endangerment to murder, began. The protracted final act, *The People v. John Landis et al.,* opened on September 3, 1986 ("et al." including Landis's longtime partner, producer George Folsey, Jr.; his production manager, Dan Allingham; veteran special effects supervisor Paul Stewart; and helicopter pilot Dorsey Wingo, a newcomer to movie-making). After nearly eleven months of testimony, often garish public sniping between the prosecutor and the defense team, open warfare between the prosecutor and her predecessor, and a diverse parade of witnesses that embraced both the Hollywood studio elite and the Asian immigrant communities of the Los Angeles basin, the jury, on May 29, 1987, acquitted the defendants on all counts. This is exactly where Hollywood would like the whole obscenity to rest, but if there is any justice, *Outrageous Conduct: Art, Ego and the*

Twilight Zone *Case* will at least temporarily forestall this willed amnesia.

Having known the authors for several years, I won't pretend to "objectivity." But this isn't going to stop me from stating that Stephen Farber (a frequent contributor to and a former Los Angeles Editor of *FQ*) and Marc Green (a former movie critic and co-author with Farber of *Hollywood Dynasties*) have synthesized and analyzed with clarity and force not just the disaster and the trial but also several disturbing Hollywood practices.

Besides examining the transcript, the authors attended the trial every day, compared notes with other reporters covering it for the local and national press, and spoke to many of the principals, including all the defendants, their lawyers, prosecutor Lea Purwin D'Agostino and her colleagues in the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office, and several witnesses and jurors. People looking for good, low-down, juicy dirt will find plenty of horrific-comic plums: Folsey's skin-crawlingly clumsy attempt to eulogize the victims, which threatened to become a plug for the movie; Landis trying to trip casting director Marci Liroff in open court after she had just delivered damaging testimony for the prosecution; Landis musing that the workaday and minority-member jurors might recognize Sidney Poitier if they saw him but not John Huston; D'Agostino's miscalculation in trying to show the jury what the explosion did to the helicopter's rotors by jabbing a straw into a potato; the disarray in the Los Angeles D. A.'s office; the worldly, sardonic comments of flamboyant defense attorney Harlan Braun about Landis—to cite just a few examples.

But Farber and Green have also sought out directors and other Hollywood workers whose comments help them place the *Twilight Zone* affair in a broader historical-personal context. They sketch the history of Hollywood stuntwork and its pursuit of risk-taking realism; the career disappointments and desperation for a fresh start of Vic Morrow; the buck-passing and timorousness of many Hollywood crew people when confronted by an intimidating director or a cadre of studio executives who can, in effect, blacklist them for stepping out of line; the way studios may arrange for their own brand of "plausible deniability" by having top film-makers work through personal companies instead of as, strictly speaking, studio employees. The result is a uniquely revealing probe of the moral confusion and casual cruelty that fuel the American film industry from top to bottom.

Despite the jury's verdict, most readers are likely to finish *Outrageous Conduct* convinced that Landis is guilty as charged on all counts (likewise Folsey and probably Allingham, too, with Stewart and Wingo coming off like more marginal grunts in the movie-making army). It all comes down, finally, to something that should be apparent to any mature adult, let alone any experienced movie-maker: You don't put children, explosions, a flying helicopter, and night shooting together on a location. Yet, as the book tells it, Landis did exactly that out of a combination of addled movie-nut's childishness and box-office kingpin's carelessness.

Its Landis is an immature, thoughtless screamer, a prototypical young airhead pop-stuffed wunderkind director turned into a little tin god because two of his pictures, *National Lampoon's Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers,* were hits. In an era when eight-figure grosses are no longer flukes or the exclusive properties of George Lucas and Stephen Spielberg, most studio executives are desperate for anything that can pass for commercial success —even a monument to mindlessness like *The Blues Brothers,* which showed a modest profit although its budget ballooned to some $30 million. Unwilling to admit that box-office success has a large element of luck in it, they are only too eager to confer carte blanche on any "genius" whose projects seem to have the Midas touch, no matter how inadequate to such responsibility the Midases may be.

But, as Farber and Green point out, movie-makers, unlike others with claims to being artists, often work with dangerous tools. Their account cites numerous examples of stunt players killed or maimed performing carelessly (and even carefully) prepared "gags," as well as testimony from directors about risks they took or errors and near-misses they were fortunate enough to avoid. William Friedkin, for instance, speaks remorsefully of the hazards he braved to get point-of-view shots necessary to make his famous car chase in *The French Connection* work. Sydney Pollack tells of learning unexpectedly that the blanks being used on the set of *Out of Africa* were a local brand more

dangerous than the Hollywood model and admits that he took a questionable chance in order to get what he felt was a vital two-shot of Meryl Streep and a trained lion. Philip Kaufman relates how he discovered, while setting up a shot for the Soviet Invasion of Prague sequence of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* that a propman had taken it upon himself to give extras playing Czech civilians real instead of papier-maché bricks to throw at other extras playing Russian invaders.

Farber and Green relentlessly attack the wunderkinder of Landis's stripe, to whom they assign much of the blame for the grandiose, numbing artistic and human emptiness that has characterized far too much American studio deal- and movie-making for more than a decade. If anything, they display even more withering contempt for Steven Spielberg (who coproduced *Twilight Zone: The Movie* but directed only one segment of it), to them the epitome of this trend. Although one of his key subordinates, Frank Marshall, evaded attempts to subpoena him throughout the trial and Spielberg himself was not required to take the stand, there's no smoking gun in *Outrageous Conduct* to indicate that Spielberg knew anything about the illegal hiring and use of children for the Landis episode. So some may find at least a trace of D'Agostino-style overkill in these passages.

But even more telling is their revelation that, though there is no conclusive evidence that anyone at Warner Bros. knew of a conspiracy to hire the children illegally, those children would never have been called for if two Warners executives, Lucy Fisher and Terry Semel, had not pressed Landis to write what proved to be the fatal scene into his script so that its protagonist, despite being a raging bigot, would also be a "sympathetic character" of the sort that present Hollywood gospel considers mandatory if an audience is going to "like" or "feel for" a character. This moronic ideology has probably wrecked more Hollywood movies, both humanly and artistically, than any other during the past 10 or 15 years; without it, Landis could have shot his simplistic little parable and perhaps felt that he had done his bit in the fight against nasty racists, and nobody would have had to die for his grade-school pretension.

This, in fact, is the really savage irony of the whole event: the Landis episode of *Twilight Zone: The Movie* is playable even though no trace of the fatal scene (added to the script ostensibly to "humanize" its hero and actually to beef up its commerciality, at last in the eyes of studio executives) remains in it. In other words, Vic Morrow, Myca Le, and Renée Chen died for an outtake, one that never should have been shot, to a less-than-mediocre do-good Hollywood liberal parable. Not that their deaths would have been one bit more palatable had the movie proven to be a great work of art; it's just that this particular twist reveals with special sharpness a salient truth about contemporary Hollywood: so many of its denizens who are the quickest and the loudest to demand "sympathetic characters" aren't such sympathetic characters themselves. An angry and sorrowful cautionary tale of what the wrong kind of intoxication with movies and Hollywood can cause, *Outrageous Conduct* charts this treacherous terrain with an insightfulness that's unlikely to become dated any time soon.

—MICHAEL DEMPSEY

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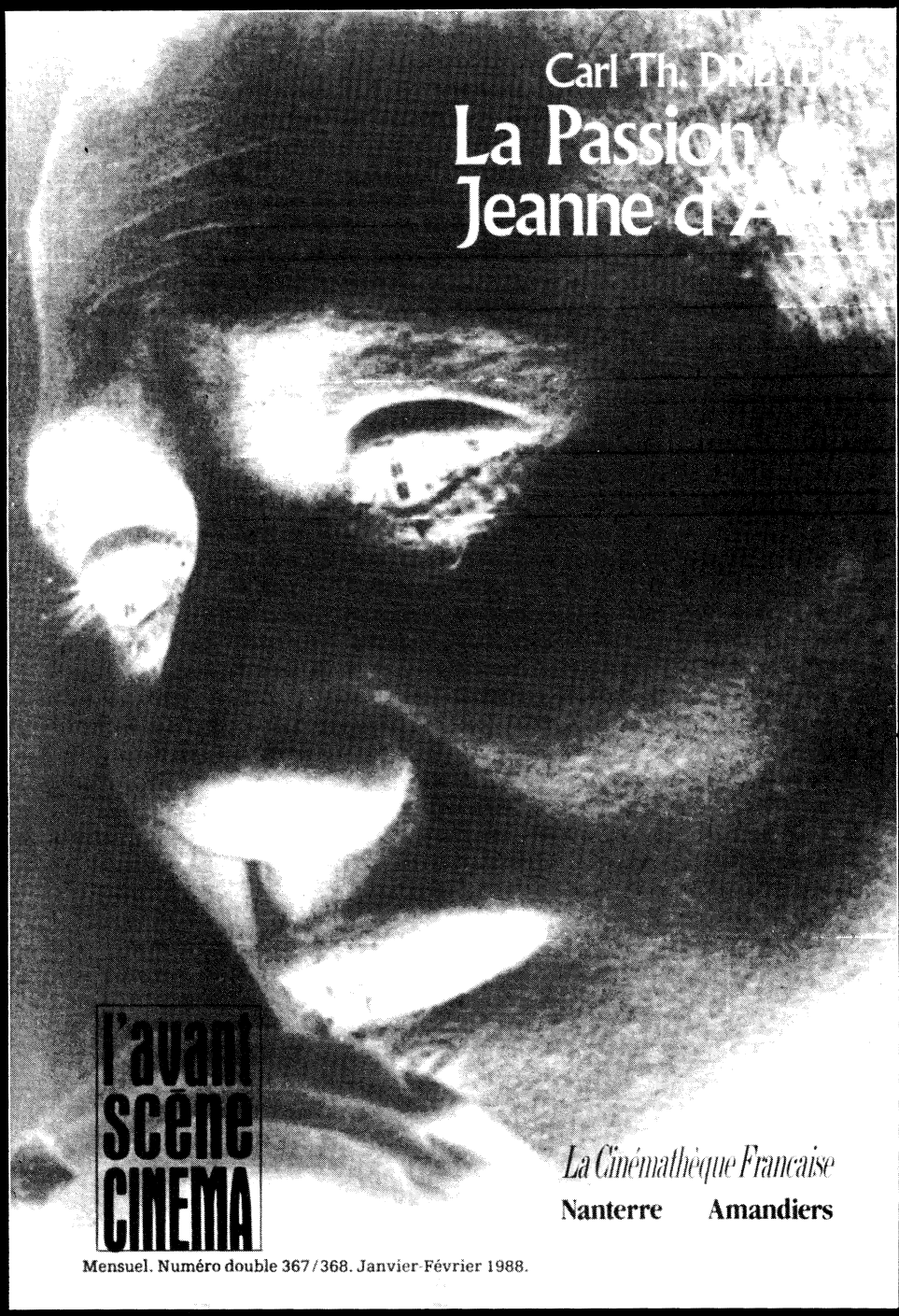

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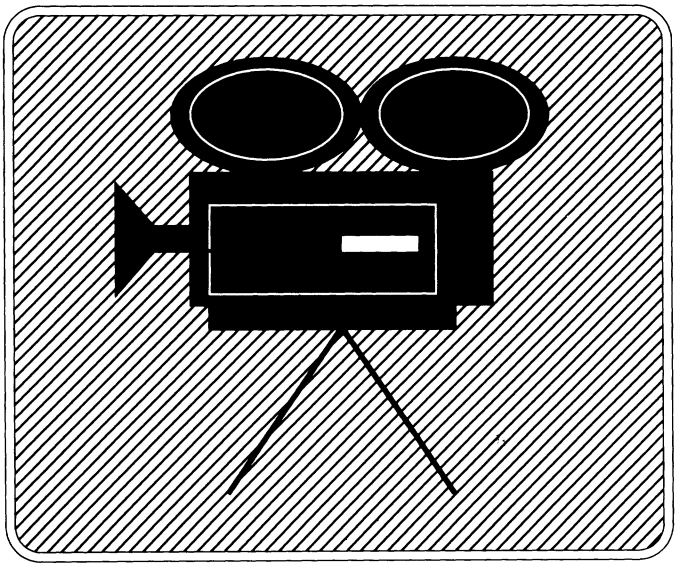

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